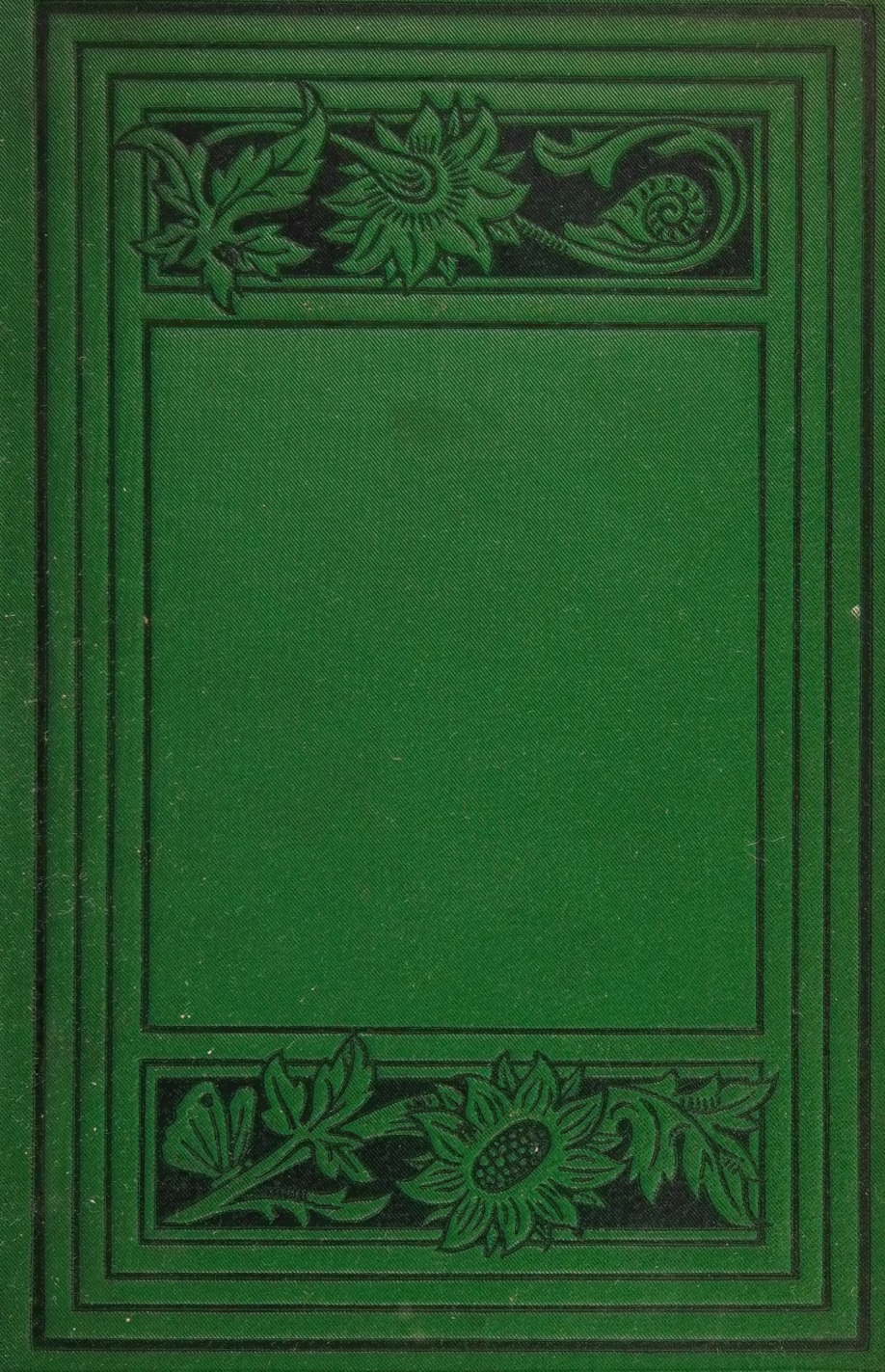

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LAND AHEAD

VOL. III.

LAND AHEAD

A Novel.

BY

COURTENEY GRANT,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE LADY LORRAINE," "OUR NEXT NEIGHBOUR," ETC.

Human soul
Must rise from individual to the whole.
Self-Love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre moved, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace;
His country next, and next all human race;
Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of the mind
Take every creature in, of ev'ry kind;
Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,
And Heaven beholds its image in his breast.—POPE'S *Essay on Man.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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LAND AHEAD!

CHAPTER I.

A trusty villain, sir, that very oft,
When I am dull with care and melancholy,
Lightens my humour with his merry jests.
Comedy of Errors, Act i. Sc. 2.

FROGHAMBURY village had certainly come in for an undue share of excitement. Not only had there been Margaret's arrival, and then her face, manner, and conduct to criticize, but now the old clergyman, who had seemed a fixture throughout eternity, or at least a specimen of humanity who had made up his mind to outlive every one else, had died; that event alone seemed inconceivable; but after that there had been the funeral, the relatives, the will; more exciting than all, the sale of his furniture and effects, amongst which a

curious copy of "Boydell's Shakspere" had been the most valuable article; and then, speedily following on all this, had been the arrival of Mr. Tudor.

He came radiant as the rising sun. The purest benevolence shone from his eye, the tenderest human sympathy was inscribed on his face. He was "hail-fellow-well-met" to every one; everybody was his "dear parishioner." The astuteness and worldly jocularity which had distinguished him before seemed gone; his outer man also had changed. A wide-brimmed straw hat, with a pretty yellow ribbon, a brown holland suit, made up his attire in his garden. For these articles he always apologized; they were not clerical he knew; he must seem a renegade to his cloth he knew; but the heat was extreme, and the garden needed looking after; and then, he would add, with a look of his old slyness, he found the farmers rather liked his get-up, and the cottagers too; and it was a great thing to win their favour. The result was that their former trim friend was now transformed into a simple countryman, who looked as if he had had no ambition, or knowledge, or interest beyond Froghambury village all his life. Never had such a model country parson been seen before; the cloth and the black hat were always within reach should visitors arrive. Mar-

garet insisted on asking him to Froghambury at once, and paid no heed at all to the resistance she encountered.

"Let us see what he is like first," had said Mrs. Vane.

"Oh, we all know quite well what he is like; and he is our old friend. Moreover, Dudley, your tutor! of course you must ask him; he must have the run of the house."

"You are very hospitable, certainly," said Mrs. Vane.

"No," said Margaret, "I am not that; but I am so dull."

Then Mrs. Vane looked triumphantly at Dudley, and Margaret perceived she had made a mistake.

However, Mr. Tudor was invited, and when he was made to understand that he would be welcome whenever he liked, he was profuse in his acknowledgments. One or two family dinners, however, slightly cooled his gratitude, and soon he delicately hinted to Margaret that he would prefer being invited when he was wanted.

"You find our family fare a little——" she paused for a word. She was standing on the steps, patting Fritz as she spoke to him.

"Oh no, no, not at all. But the fact is, I am

never quite sure of being quite welcome. I might be *de trop*. Then—dinner is a solemnity."

"It is here; but a solemnity without ceremony."

"And yet I like ceremony about it."

"Certainly."

"I like my fish, and my *entrées*, and my *petits plats*, and my little nameless luxuries."

"Yes."

"*Un diner sans facon est une perfidie*, you know, Lady Vane."

"I quite agree with you; I like a pretty table, and everything as cheerful and as well arranged as possible."

"Then why do you not do it?"

"I am not mistress here."

"Whew! I thought Mrs. Vane was only staying here."

Margaret shook her head.

"Then, Queen Daisy, your reign is limited here?"

"Very."

The old man was sorry for her. Certainly he had worked against her, and she had won; but his antagonism had won him his living, notwithstanding, and now that his victory was complete, when he discovered a flaw in hers he could afford to be generous and compassionate.

"And you are dull sometimes?"

"Sometimes."

"It is too uniform a life; there is nothing to break it. Nothing is more dreadful than monotony."

"Will you find it so?"

"I! oh no; I shall have my work. You might help me with the choir, perhaps? We might make it the poetry of music."

"So we might."

"It is a great thing to understand the dispositions of those with whom we have to live. The eyes are the windows of the soul, and the face is its tablet. He who never laughs is a knave, and he who always laughs is a fool."

"We never laugh," said Margaret; "but notwithstanding that, I think we are rather dull fools than knaves."

"Very likely. Dullness——"

"You are very rude, Mr. Tudor."

"Ah, dear me! I beg your pardon; I only meant that of course you were not knaves."

"People generally are fools; at least nearly all those who seem to be so are, and most of those who do not look it are."

"Still we must suffer them."

"Oh, gladly."

Soon after this there dawned a happier day for Margaret, for the time came for the long-promised visit to Carlingsford, and she and Dudley started for their three days' stay in great spirits.

Not that Dudley was in such glee; he was nervous and uncomfortable. He expected to meet the neighbourhood, and he did not know the neighbourhood. To have "to come out" in the neighbourhood would be "no end of a bore." Then he had an instinctive feeling that Margaret would be liked and admired at once, that he would have to follow by the next train, and would in fact be tolerated for Margaret's sake. He could not talk as Margaret did; he did not know about things as Margaret did. This was a bore. Then what should he do there? It was a bore to leave home.

"But what do you do at home, Dudley?" asked she, as they drove along.

"I! oh, don't you see me busy all day? I can only just get through it. Stables, you know, and the dogs, and then the paper comes——"

"Well, but you only make it the excuse for a cigar under the tree; you never read it."

"Don't I, though?"

"At least you never know anything about it."

"Oh yes, I do. And then there's luncheon; then afterwards you generally want something, or there's sure to be something to go and look at somewhere; or if not, a fellow is not bored, and he can do as he likes; needn't dress or anything. Now here at this place I shall have to be on my p's and q's all day long."

What a difference it was from Froghambury! Lovely gardens, and a beautifully arranged house, smiling, willing servants, a host who seemed to think of nothing but the comfort of his guests, and a hostess who was a good and beautiful fairy—nothing more.

"Where is your wand, Lady Lorraine," asked Margaret of her, "wherewith you make us all so happy?"

"I think, if I succeed at all, it is because I am happy myself. So after all, if there be a wand, it must be Chester's, I fancy. Shall we come and ask him if he keeps it in his pocket?"

"How pretty it is to see them together," said she to Dudley afterwards.

"And isn't it as pretty to see us together?" asked he, drawing her to him.

(They were more like Beauty and the Beast, alas!)

"No, certainly not; for I am not as pretty as

she is, nor are you anything like as handsome as Lord Chester."

What happy days they were. Music in the evenings, boating on the lake, and driving in the afternoons. Long talks with Lorraine in the mornings. A gay party in the house, and the neighbourhood in fragments to dinner.

One day there was a cricket-match. Dudley had talked much about cricket.

"He can play," said Margaret, confidently.

"Can he?" asked Lord Chester.

"Oh yes," said she.

That afternoon fate went against them.

"Dudley will save it," said Margaret.

Alas! a round o was all he got; next innings another round o was added to his score.

"What *can* you do, I wonder?" asked Margaret fretfully of him when he returned to the spectators.

But Lorraine's eyes were on her face, and she did not repeat her question. The next moment she heard Lorraine telling him of the difficulties of the light and the ground, and doing her best to comfort him.

After all it did not matter. Lord Chester saved the game; he made a hundred runs. How his wife clapped her hands as the score mounted up.

The next day they returned to Froghambury. How dreadful it seemed to Margaret; how flat, how uninteresting. It was late when they reached home, for Lorraine had kept them to dinner on that last evening, and when they went into the drawing-room at Froghambury the members of the family were in different stages of somnambulism as usual.

At first it seemed impossible for them to wake up.

Then Dudley sang out—

"Hulloa, mother! hulloa!"

"Here!"

"So you have come back," said Lilly, drearily.

"Good evening," said Uncle Ted, waking up.

"Have you seen the paper?" asked Miss Wygram, holding it up to hide a yawn.

Mrs. Vane had quite gone off again.

How terribly uninteresting this seemed after the light, and laughter, and the music they had left behind them. Did not Dudley remark it too? No; Dudley had thrown himself in an arm-chair, and was stretching out his legs to their fullest extent, as though now he might again experience real indulgence and real comfort.

Margaret turned away disgusted; but on the

stairs she met Fritz, and she sat down there in the dark with her faithful friend beside her, and cried as if her heart would break.

Presently afterwards she thought she would go to bed.

"In fact," said she to herself, when she reached her room, "I might go to bed now, and stay there for ever so long. That would fill up the hours with quite an unprecedented success. But then what a bad example for the servants. Besides, how shall I live? I cannot have trays coming up all day. I could live on soup, I dare say, if I take no exercise and do nothing; or, on the days Dudley shoots or hunts in the winter, I might stay in bed till dinner-time, and then go down. No one would be any the wiser or any the worse."

But the next day Mr. Tudor came, and fancying there was something wrong, he stayed a long time, amusing her with parish news, and with an account of his proposed reforms. Then, little by little, when her grievances oozed out, and she boldly contrasted Froghambury with Carlingsford, he let her talk, and he let drop some of his wise saws for her edification.

"It is no flowery road that leads to glory," said he.

"There is no glory for me," said she, despondingly.

"Oh come, my young friend, what was that you said to Valentin von Broderode—of how you were going to reform and rouse Dudley, of the great man you were going to make of him."

"Ah!"

In truth she had half forgotten that fond dream. It seemed among the impossibilities now.

"I do not know that you are not to be envied after all. The rest of the family may be cold and careless, but in your hands lies all the future. Don't you know the old French proverb: 'Ceux qui n'aiment pas, ont rarement de grandes joies; ceux qui aiment, ont souvent de grandes tristesses.' Where are their joys? and your sorrows, are they so very bitter? We are going to ride rough-shod over them, and trample them to dust for the wind to blow away."

"You are very kind," said she.

After all this old man was not the least worldly. In that straw hat he was simplicity itself.

"I hate worldly wisdom," said she, *à propos* of nothing except her own thought, and looking at him, wondering at the change in him from the old days at Sonnenthal. Yet even as she spoke

a sarcastic smile overspread his countenance, and she began to find her former friend again. "Not that I do not acknowledge its utility, or even the necessity of having it if one would keep one's friends, and even if it would do them good. But calculation of any sort is hateful; the arithmetic of daily life is the last sum I would do. Impulse generally produces the noblest results."

"And by impulse the greatest follies are committed."

There was Mr. Tudor of Sonnenthal again, straw hat notwithstanding; but after all, "can the leopard change his spots?"

The weeks wore away. The Chesters had gone to London; afterwards they went to pay visits, and Margaret missed them sadly. Yet Lady Lorraine had left her a legacy: the neighbourhood came to call.

And not content with that only, the neighbourhood was more magnanimous still. It overcame its prejudices against the Vanes, who were proud and unsociable; against Margaret, who was a foreigner, and a German Frau, but very free and easy; it overcame all this, and was kind to her. At first for Lorraine's sake, and then for Margaret's own sake, for it learnt to like her.

So that though the Chesters were away, yet

Margaret was not alone. She accepted every invitation she got, she made every friend she could, and she took Dudley wherever she went. But how she was to return the neighbourhood's civilities perplexed her sadly.

Then the autumn came. A glorious September and the partridges. Even Uncle Teddy woke up. Margaret went out walking with them. But Dudley was always tired; he always wanted to come in first.

"How unfortunate you are with your birds," said Mr. Tudor to him one day.

"You never kill one," said Margaret.

"I am always unfortunate with everything," said he.

"A dead failure, instead of a dead shot," said Lilly.

"I must go in to my painting," said Margaret. "Dudley, will you come to the house with me?"

It was like taking care of some helpless child.

Then there was the cub-hunting.

Dudley got up two or three mornings, but he was so sleepy afterwards Margaret advised him to go to bed.

She herself, however, acquired a taste for it; she began to jump; she grew fond of the horses. The early morning was delicious.

"Some one must ride the horses, you know," said she.

The honour of the family seemed to rest with her. The neighbourhood said she was the only Vane who had been seen in the hunting-field for ages. And she was not a Vane.

"But some one must show the family is awake," said she.

So she rode poor Sir Gilbert's horses, and soon was as keen as any. So as the season wore on, she began to ride her weariness of Froghambury away.

One day she came in late, it was dark, and the moon was rising behind the trees.

"Who is that on the stairs?" cried she, for she had heard a voice she thought she knew.

"Who but your own dear mother, my love?"

Another moment, and she was clasped in her mother's warm embraces.

CHAPTER II.

In se magna ruunt.—*Lucan.*

In melle sunt sitæ linguæ vestræ atque orationes,
Corda felle sunt lita atque aceto.—*Plautius.*

"My dear mother, why did you come?"

Margaret stood with her arm on her mother's shoulder as she asked the question.

"I have let the house in Hans Place. Such a good offer I could not refuse. Not, dear, not that that is why I came, but that having let it, I thought I might as well come."

"I see."

But Margaret did not feel altogether pleased. She ought to have been warned of this arrival. She would have liked to have made proper preparations; moreover, she was not certain how her mother would get on with the household at Froghambury. The disappointment of existence there she had carefully concealed.

"And then, Margaret, I thought the surprise

would be nice. It is great fun, isn't it? You didn't expect your dear mother, did you?"

"No. Have you seen the others?"

"Oh yes; all of them. Charming, are they not?"

"Yes."

"I cannot stay long, dear. I have only brought a few clothes, and then, too, when one has so much to do as I have——"

"Oh, Mrs. Hoffman, I hope you will give us as much of your company as possible. It will be so nice for Margaret."

It was Dudley's mother who spoke.

Margaret was amazed at her civility. Perhaps after all her mother had been right to cause them all a surprise. Certainly, left to herself, she would never have ventured to invite her.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hoffman was running over with enthusiasm, with affection, with meek courtesy, with admiration for all she saw.

During dinner a gradual change came over her. She looked from one to the other, making odd and sudden efforts to extract conversation from each in turn.

Margaret laughed to herself as she remembered her own first experience of this meal at Froghambury.

"Do you drink coffee after dinner, Mrs. Hoffman, or tea?" asked Mrs. Vane.

"Oh, coffee, if you please, Mrs. Vane. How do you make your coffee now? I have quite a wonderful little machine."

"Have you?"

"Yes. Isn't my coffee good, Margaret?"

"Yes, mother, it is."

"No, I never knew anything make coffee like my machine. It is quite a distillation."

"Here's a fly," said Uncle Ted. "I have a great objection to flies."

"Did you see the story in the paper of the fly that bit a man to death?" asked Mrs. Hoffman.

"No," said Uncle Ted, visibly roused even more than by the fly.

"It was an officer: he was with some ladies in the Jardin des Plantes, and a fly settled on his lips, and he brushed it off as you did, but it swelled, and swelled, and he died." (Uncle Ted was feeling his cheek by this time.) "They think the fly was poisoned by the meat used for the animals."

"There is a fly in China," said Dudley, "its bite kills people."

"Have you heard of the Persian bug? It only bites Europeans, and always kills."

"No flies in India," said Uncle Ted.

"But snakes and scorpions; two or three sorts of them," said Mrs. Vane.

"The deaths in Scinde from snake bites are something enormous," said Uncle Ted.

"Why don't they give rewards?" asked Mrs. Hoffman.

"They do; the same as for tigers."

"What nice cages they have at the Zoological now," said Miss Wygram.

"Yes; I like the Zoo. very much," said Dudley.

"So do I. I am very fond of it," said Lilly.

This feverish brilliancy was not likely to last, and soon, save for a remark trickled here, or a word dropped there, silence again reigned supreme.

After dinner, Mrs. Hoffman seated herself close to Mrs. Vane.

Margaret, on her way to the piano, wondered how long they would converse amicably.

"How well my child looks," said Mrs. Hoffman.

"Yes, I think she is happy now," said Mrs. Vane, laying a stress on the *now*, as though she were the martyr of all their machinations.

"Oh, not a doubt of it," said the other, ignoring the suggestion; "and then I suppose it is not always like this, dear Mrs. Vane?"

"Like this!"

"I mean, you have people to dinner, or company in the house sometimes."

"Oh yes; for instance, dear Mrs. Hoffman, we have you now."

"Yes," she answered, feeling solitary for a moment and wondering involuntarily when the next guest would arrive. "And then, I suppose, Dudley talks more."

"Oh yes; when Mr. Tudor dines here he talks a great deal to him."

"Can he? can any one talk much when Mr. Tudor is with them. Dudley must be very clever."

"Oh, he is."

"When he used to come to us in Hans Place he talked more than this."

"Ah, then he was in love."

Mrs. Hoffman laughed softly.

"And now, I suppose, you will be having more people?"

"People!"

"I am thinking of Margaret; she likes having people round her."

"Yes; perhaps one or two of my relations are coming."

"Oh, that will be very nice. And then, of

course, such perfect confidence exists between you all by this time, that your friends are hers, and her friends are yours."

"Exactly, dear Mrs. Hoffman. We are a most united family."

"Margaret has been so used to society of late."

"Oh yes; and the sad effect of seeing much of society is that it does not exactly give happiness."

"No, perhaps not. But it prevents our being quite happy afterwards in solitude."

"But here, dear Mrs. Hoffman, she could never be solitary; our large family and happy arrangements preclude that."

"Yes; but still I could fancy, dear Mrs. Vane, that my Margaret might not be quite satisfied here. She is so clever, and that gives a sort of hunger to which you and I, dear friend, are strangers. '*La faim chasse le loup du bois,*' you know."

"Is she so clever? Dear Mrs. Hoffman, I am going to say something very coarse, but you will forgive me, I know. 'The swan of one house is a goose in another.' Ah, there is coffee."

"Did you mean Dudley?"

"No. Coffee. Now is it good? Quite as you like it? Have you enough sugar?"

To Margaret Mrs. Hoffman showed nothing at all of her fears for her amusement. She went all over the place and house admiring everything, finding or imagining new beauties till she tired herself and every one else. She admired the china, the pictures, the old armour, especially she admired the Cupids to be seen on the cornices and on every available corner of Froghambury, and looked slily at Margaret as she noticed them.

Margaret took all her admiration without comment or complaint; showed her the horses, and drove her out; introduced her to Mrs. Simeon, and did all she could to amuse her.

The more she did, the more she talked and smiled for her mother, the more Mrs. Vane frowned.

At last one day Margaret found the carriage forbidden, and going to Mrs. Vane, they had a passage of arms on the subject.

Margaret was defeated, and, bursting into her room, gave way to angry tears.

Mrs. Hoffman was sitting there.

"Why, Margaret, what is the matter?"

So now the volcano had burst.

"I am very dull here, mother."

"Of course you are. But you are so foolish. I have been watching you. You just let them

make a peg in the wall of you, on which they hang their cloaks and their insults."

Margaret stared.

"Dudley is dull too, and does not help me."

"Of course not. Whoever expected him to? You must wait ever so long for him. '*Il faut attendre le boiteux.*'"

"I am sure I do nothing but wait, mother," said Margaret, passionately. "Am I not alone? In my painting, my music, my books, who have I to take any interest now? Am I not alone? and am I not always looking behind, waiting for him?"

"It is hard," said Mrs. Hoffman, softly.

But she settled herself more comfortably in her chair, and looked out over the park as she spoke.

"I have succeeded in a way," went on Margaret. "At first I had only Fritz,"—Mrs. Hoffman laughed, but Margaret's face was quite grave,—"but now I hunt and I drive, and I have made acquaintances, and have reminded people of the existence of the Vanes in quite an unprecedented way. No one knew them before."

"It was just about that I wanted to speak," said Mrs. Hoffman, gently. "You must be careful, dear. People are so ill-natured; they will say that you are fast, reckless, that you do not

care for appearances, that you are making ducks and drakes of the property."

"Ah!"

Some breaths of this sort had reached her, but she had laughed at them as ridiculous.

"They will say you are unwomanly."

"Because my husband does nothing, am I to do nothing too?"

"Yes."

"But that is just why I do it."

"Mrs. Vane will have powerful handles to use against you, if you are not careful. I am glad I came—if only to be of use to you in this. I shall stay a little longer now, even if I put myself to considerable inconvenience to do it."

Margaret sighed; there would be no peace in the house as long as her mother was there. Even Dudley, she thought, was becoming a little estranged from her, and was going over to the other side. At last he came to her one day.

"I say, Margaret, how long is your mother going to stay?"

"You had better ask her," retorted she.

She did not want to prolong the visit either, but it irritated her to be asked about it in that way.

"Because my mother is in a fury, and says she

is no longer mistress here; that you and Mrs. Hoffman are turning her out."

"Really!" asked Margaret, interested.

"And that won't do, you know."

"How could we do it?" asked she.

"It is very odd how people like Froghambury," he went on conceitedly; "when they once come they never will go."

"Very odd. But I am quite ready for a move, Dudley."

"Oh, you! you would never be still if you could help it."

After a time, when Mrs. Hoffman's position at Froghambury became more assured, and she seemed in fact to have taken root there, then she made less scruple about showing her feelings.

"I declare, Margaret," she said one day, "it is too bad. The clocks are all wrong, and nobody cares. The paper doesn't come, and nobody cares. I feel ready to cry."

"I think Castle Don't Care would be a good name for Froghambury; don't you, mother?" answered Margaret.

"And such waste in the grounds, and such negligence. Do you just see how the place is overgrown? it is terrible. It will all be nothing

but cover for foxes soon, I am sure. The garden is dreadful."

"Mrs. Vane will not spend on it, mother."

"And so she has nothing out of it. What waste of good soil and labour. If that is not penny wise and pound foolish, I should like to know what is!"

"Your energy is dreadful, mother. Don't you know that this is a land where it is always afternoon?"

Christmas was over long ago with its dull festivities, consisting more in the doling out of beef and mutton and in stuffing the school-children than in anything else; the winter was giving way now, the hunting was coming to an end, and Margaret was dreading the same terrible round of spring, summer, and autumn once more.

Of the Chesters she had seen much, and the more she saw of them the more she liked them; but there was many a weary mile between Froghambury and Carlingsford, and the visits she and Lorraine could pay to each other were few and far between.

At last Margaret fell ill.

"Sheer weariness, poor dear; I know it is," said her mother. "I am glad I am with her."

In truth, weariness had a great deal to do with

it. Life seemed terrible in its monotony. One day, to avoid it, she kept her bed; the next, she felt unable to get up. She was so pale and thin, they were really alarmed for her.

"It is atrophy," said Mrs. Hoffman.

The doctors prescribed change.

A week after she was well enough to be moved, and London was the first stage. They went to Hans Place; the lease had expired, and it was Mrs. Hoffman's once more.

"Do you remember, mother, our first arrival here from Germany?" asked Margaret, as they drove up. "Then I did not like it; now I come to it, oh! so gratefully."

Dudley looked at her sharply.

Was his marriage a failure? had that too got defeat stamped upon it so soon?

CHAPTER III.

Industry is the natural state of man, and the perfection of his nature is dependent on it: the progression which distinguishes him from everything else in the material world is maintained by it alone. —*Faraday.*

Is it not a well-known fact, urged by all the faculty, that London is quite the worst place for health? Is not there a scarcity of air? and what air there is, is it not of a very bad kind? Does not the smoke come back to us, and do not our poor lungs have a very hard struggle indeed for existence? If there is anything at all the matter with us, are we not advised by the faculty to get out of London as fast as we can? There can be no hope of cure, it says, as long as we are in that tainted atmosphere. But no; the faculty is but human after all, and even the faculty therefore is sometimes wrong. In Margaret's case, certainly, it was very wrong. Mrs. Hoffman had been told only to allow her daughter to stay there just long enough to rest, and then to hurry her off to the

sea as soon as possible. She wanted bracing, she wanted all sorts of things, but the last thing she did want was London.

The faculty was grievously wrong. London was just what Margaret Vane did want. She was dying of *ennui*. We will not call it a broken heart, or of disappointment, it was simply boredom. Disappointments there had been.

Froghambury was no paradise, but that she had never expected; her new relations were no angels, but that she had known. But the prose into which her life had settled she had not expected; the dull monotony of Dudley's character she had not expected; more than all, the enforced idleness she had not expected.

She had dreamed of improving him, of raising him, but there had met her a hopeless defeat; he would not be raised. Moreover, she could find no lever to do it with; and he was so heavy, it was impossible to do it without a lever.

The flat, uninteresting desolation of her life appalled her. But now in London it was different. Interests met her on every side. Energy brightened her life again. Hope animated it. A future seemed possible. Her step grew light again, her cheeks had colour, her eyes shone as

of old, laughter rippled forth continually, and the faculty looked on amazed.

Is not the human heart mysterious? Which of them, wipe his spectacles as he would, could say exactly in what ratio the mind acts on the health of the body?

"Oh no, Dudley, we will not go; we must stay here awhile. We have old friends to see, quantities of things to do, then we will go to the sea if you like."

But was he in a hurry, seeing her happy again?

No; for once more he had found the girl he had so loved. The limp, uninteresting, dull woman, whose face never changed, and whose eye never brightened, had vanished. Here was "Queen Daisy" again.

Plays to see, old friends to talk to; this one's picture to look at, that career to ask about; some histories to ask for, and some triumphs to hear; some applause to give, some sympathy and help to bestow; music to hear, old friendships to renew—in short, how many broken threads of life were there not to take up?

And Dudley too was interested. He began to think, "There must be something in it."

Margaret watched his growing interest.

"He is awake at last," thought she.

He grew kinder, softer, more sympathetic as he learnt. His waking was gradual, but it was sincere.

He began to understand the advantage of progress over standing still. He had thought Froghambury was at the top of the hill, and that he could not go higher. Margaret taught him there were higher hills than Froghambury, to which that even was but a hillock.

"And even, Dudley, if you stand there idle so long, you will find yourself rolling down. There is nothing to keep you up."

About that time Dudley noticed Mrs. Hoffman and Margaret had long, grave conversations. Dudley wondered what they were about. He noticed too that Mrs. Hoffman seemed always to be urging Margaret to take some step, which apparently she disliked. Margaret too generally after these talks wore a grave, anxious look.

"Are you tired of London, Dudley?" asked his wife, at last.

"No. Are you? Shall we go to the sea?"

Dudley was afraid to mention Froghambury now.

"You would not like a trip to Paris?"

"Yes. Anywhere in the world. I should like that though, if you'll do the talking."

"Sure, Dudley?"

She was touched by his ready acquiescence. Afterwards he did not regret it.

It was another honeymoon, a happier, better honeymoon. They knew each other better now; it was surer, more secure happiness. It was just Easter time; everything was coming out. Sweet blossoms waved overhead, fragrant odours filled the air. Everything was gay, radiant, joyous. Existence seemed a holiday. Smiles seemed to meet them everywhere, and laughter seemed to be at every turn.

Dudley was amazed "that life abroad could be so jolly."

At the little dinners at restaurants, at the play, driving in the Bois, going to Versailles, walking in the forest of Fontainebleau, with Margaret by his side, full of laughter, full of play, Dudley thought this could not be true, that it was too good to be true, and that he should wake up roughly some day.

So he did. Thus:—

Driving in the Bois, watching the gay crowd, and mingling with it, the contrast between this life and that at Froghambury struck him suddenly.

"Margaret, how shall we like Froghambury after this? When shall we go home?"

The grave, anxious look which Dudley had noticed came into Margaret's eyes.

"Never, Dudley."

So that was it; that was the meaning of the long talks between mother and daughter. Margaret would not go back.

It was no use. Urge, plead, persuade, argue as he might, Margaret would never share a divided reign at Froghambury with Mrs. Vane again.

"I will sweep a crossing rather. I will take to the stage rather. I will live anywhere—do anything rather. But I must be free; I must have something, however small, to call my own."

For a week Dudley held out.

There was no word on the subject, and Margaret never tried to break the silence. Only she was more gentle, if possible, more meek, more piteous; and she was waiting.

Did Dudley know how firm she could be?

At last, one evening, quite late,—for in their delightful Bohemian existence hours were not regarded,—they were crossing the bridge behind the Tuileries over the Seine, when Margaret laid her hand on his arm, and stopped to look down into the river.

"How peaceful the water is," said she.

The moon was shining overhead. It shone on her face and eyes; it made long ripples of light in the river below.

"I would rather throw myself down there now, straight into it, and be at rest for ever,—away from you, away from life, though we are so happy now,—than take up with life again as we left it at Froghambury."

"Why?"

"Because I do nothing but fail there. I get bad myself there, and I make you bad too."

There was a silence of some minutes.

Margaret knew he was thinking. Which way would it end?

In the silence the Tuileries clock struck out—eleven strokes. Would they never end? Margaret knew he would not speak till the clock had done.

"All right, old gal," said he, at last; "you shall have your way. We must write to my mother."

"Thank you, Dudley."

"But you must write the letter, you know. I'll just copy it."

The next day, in their little sitting-room at the hotel "Meurice," the joint production was penned.

Margaret was sitting at the table, her pen in her hand, and with writing materials spread out before her. Dudley, with his hands in his pockets, was walking up and down the room.

"Let me see," said she. "'My dear mother,' I suppose?"

"Yes. My dear mother," echoed Dudley.

Then they looked at each other.

"I say, Margaret," said he, presently, stopping in his walk, and standing still in front of her, with his hands in his pockets, "don't let us make it too serious; let's write in a jokey sort of way."

"Ah, well! I don't quite know, Dudley."

Then she laid down her pen.

"'Here we are in Paris,'" suggested he.

"She knows that."

"Yes; but it's a beginning; 'and enjoying ourselves immensely.'"

"I almost think it would be better to go to the point at once."

"Let's hear."

"'My dear mother, we have been talking over things lately, and have come to the decision that——'"

"Good heavens! that is taking the bull by the horns. But what have we decided?"

Margaret was silent.

"You see, old gal," said he, presently, "if you are going at it like that I had rather you took it upon your shoulders."

"Well, let us hear your jokey way."

"'My dear mother, here we are in Paris——'"

"She knows it."

"'Enjoying ourselves immensely. Plays, dinners, driving——'"

"She will say we are ruining ourselves."

"Oh, well! leave out the dinners then."

"Well?"

"'And we have come to the conclusion that Froghambury is very dull'—and—what then, Margaret?"

"No, that won't do at all, Dudley. Look here! 'Margaret and I have been talking over things lately, and I find that to be happy at Froghambury we really must have a change there.'"

"Well! go on."

"I shall write that. And then, listen, 'I wish to take my position there, and to be master——'"

"By George! isn't that——"

"Listen to me. 'Margaret too must have some interests and some responsibilities; she wishes to do her duty by the place as much as I do.'"

Then she paused, thinking. Dudley watched her anxiously.

"'My Uncle Gilbert,'" she continued, "'I am sure, wished it. I do not think, my dear mother, it was ever his wish that you should reside at Froghambury, and you know one must respect a dead man's wishes.'"

"I wish you would write this in your name."

"So I will. No; I won't. It will be of no use from me. Of course I can say flatly I will not return as long as your mother is mistress there, as that is true, but I do not see the good of saying it."

"No; more do I."

"You see, Dudley," said she, presently, laying down her pen, and looking into his face, "how unfair it is on both of us if your mother should live there. If she took an interest in us, and gave us interests, instead of cutting off all possibility of any supply of them, then it would be a different thing. But she cuts off from me all work, all duties; she would deny me all amusement if she could; she does her best to prevent me from having friends as it is. It is like being put in a gilded cage, without food, or water, or sunshine, and being told to enjoy oneself. It is not fair on human life."

"You know I am very well content. I don't care for work."

"And you have no ambition?"

"Not much."

"Not even for freedom?"

"Of course it would be pleasanter without any of them there."

"It is a most unrighteous act, I think, her putting herself there. She has her money, and so has Lilly; why are they to live upon you?"

"She says she leaves us perfectly free; you particularly."

"Yes; but that is mockery. Free, when there is nothing to choose from. Kings without territory. It narrows existence too frightfully."

"What would you have?"

"I only want to be allowed to live my life. I don't want to be tied down to little tiresome rules of monotonous regularity of Mrs. Vane's making, for no better reason than it is her pleasure to be tyrant. I cannot show her all my letters—they are about my friends' affairs more than mine; nor do I always care to show her yours; but still I had rather do that than have her prying here and there, and treating me as a conspirator. I do not care for a carriage and

horses as a rule, but still sometimes I do want to get over to Lady Chester; and then jealous looks are hard to bear, and to be told one is encroaching on Mrs. Vane's position is harder still. I don't want to be sent to Coventry for a week for being late for luncheon, when perhaps I was sitting with some sick woman, or else putting finishing touches to a drawing. Ideas do not so often strike me that I can afford to throw them away recklessly. Oh, Dudley, those little annoyances make up the sum of life."

"Poor old girl! I don't understand you. I know I am always ready enough for my food when it comes; the day would be precious long and dull without it. But you, I suppose, are different."

"Oh, Dudley, one must do something. One cannot live day after day in the country like that, and feel at night you are no farther on than you were in the morning. One must help somebody. It is the only charm of existence. Indeed, when one sees a duty before one, one must do it. You don't see it, so you can't do it."

"Good luck to it."

"Dudley, just you and I at Froghambury, we should be so happy."

"Really now! is that true? Well! then let us go on with the letter."

"Let me see. Where had I got to? Oh! 'dead man's wishes.'"

"After all, Margaret, I can't copy all that; not, at least, if you are going on long. I do so hate writing. Here,—it is no good beating about the bush,—give it me; besides, I have done my pipe, and it would be so much jollier outside."

He took the letter from her.

His large hand-writing looked coarse and untidy by the side of Margaret's.

"The long and short of it is, my dear Mrs. Vane, I must ask you all, with my respectful compliments, to turn out. I am sorry for it, old lady, very. But Margaret will never come back as long as you live there; she tells me so, flat. Of course you must come and stay with us, but that will be quite a different thing. You see, as Froghambury was left to me, and not to you, I wish to live there; and as she is my wife, I must have her with me."

"Shall I send your love, old gal?" taking his pipe out of his mouth to speak.

"After that I am afraid it will not look very sincere," said she, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh, it will look better."

"She sends her best love, and I remain your affectionate son,

"DUDLEY VANE."

"Now don't let me hear any more about it. I wonder how long she will take to go, and when Froghambury will be ready for us."

Margaret could not help laughing, and she began to think her husband was the strangest mixture she had ever met.

A day or two afterwards, Dudley was looking over his letters at breakfast, when he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"What is it?" asked Margaret, with a sudden pang at her heart. She thought of course that it was Mrs. Vane's answer. She had hardly slept since they wrote; she was continually imagining all sorts of horrors. Now they had come. Was it likely that a shrewd, ambitious woman like Mrs. Vane would give up in a moment the scheme of years? would she leave a comfortable home where she had attained a certain position, and where she lived on her son, instead of spending her own jointure?

"A foreign letter," said Dudley.

"Eh! of course, since you are in Paris. Who is it from?"

"Just look at the postmarks. It has come

from Berlin to Froghambury, and from Froghambury to London, and from London to——"

"Let me look."

He gave it to her.

Margaret did not waste time over the postmarks; she looked at the writing.

"It is from Valentin von Broderode," said she quietly, giving it back to her husband.

"Is it? how sharp you are."

Then he proceeded to read it.

"I say, Margaret, here's a joke! He is coming to England, and proposes to come and see us at Froghambury. What shall we do if we are not there?"

"But, Dudley, we shall be there some time, I suppose?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"When is he coming?"

"Next month; there's his letter. He says it's a year and two months since he saw us. How time flies."

"It seems to me like a hundred years. But we must put him off, Dudley."

"Oh no; write and say we are going home."

"Yes; write and say we are here, but that when we do go home—— We need not say anything about Mrs. Vane."

"You write, Margaret."

"How lazy you are, Dudley," said she, with vexation in her tone.

"You write a letter in half the time I do."

"But he is your friend."

"He used to be yours."

"He was yours first I am sure."

"How do you make that out?"

"He saved your life."

"Margaret," said he, turning to her suddenly, "we ought to be very civil to him."

"Yes."

"I don't think we have been very civil to him."

"I think you had better write to him, Dudley."

"So I will."

The old dream began to come back to her that she had once dreamed so well, how those two were to be the nearest, the dearest friends to each other as long as life should last. Valentin could improve Dudley so much; Dudley might worship again as he did at first.

She finished cracking her egg as she thought so.

"Oh!" said Dudley, suddenly; "and here is a letter from my mother."

Margaret sat speechless.

"You don't say anything."

"What does she say, Dudley?"

"My goodness! we have done it."

"Dudley,—My heart would be broken, did I not know that it is not your doing, but hers. How false she is! Fancy sending me her love, as she fells me to the ground. Some day, my poor foolish boy, you will find out how false she is. We are packing and going. Froghambury is yours; inhuman couple. 'Ingratitude! thou marble-hearted fiend; more hideous when thou show'st thee in a child than the sea-monster.'

"HENRIETTA VANE."

"Well, those are the first words of poetry I ever heard your mother say!"

"Are they poetry? deuced uncomfortable ones. What shall we do, Margaret?"

"We might write and tell her not to hurry. Oh, here is a P.S. from Lilly over the leaf. 'Mother says I'm to say we're packing and going—abroad; and that she feels how "sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."'"

"Is that poetry too, Margaret?"

"Yes; mad King Lear says them."

"Does he? oh, then he was mad, Margaret?"

"He became so. I think he must have been decidedly 'foolish' to begin with. Oh, but here is another P.S. 'It's awful fun our going away, Dudley. So glad you made a row. It *is* dull at Froghambury. You know I can't sleep as mother does.'"

"It may turn out for the best after all, Margaret," said he, as visions of a possible husband for Lilly crossed his fraternal brain.

"Yes; it may. I think I would write though, Dudley, and tell them not to hurry."

"It doesn't much matter. She won't hurry. And she'll spread awful reports about you."

"Will she?"

"Oh yes; she'll say it's all your doing; and she'll make out you are ruining the family, and that you are not fit to live with, and so on."

"After all, Dudley, I do not care for that. So long as I can do something with my life worth doing, I do not care what people say about it."

"But I'll tell her not to hurry."

CHAPTER IV.

Still is the toiling hand of care;
The panting herds repose;
Yet hark, how thro' the peopled air
The busy murmur glows!—*Gray.*

It was a holiday at Froghambury. The great gates of the park had been thrown open, and from far and near rich and poor had gathered on the scene.

Dudley and Margaret had returned. She thus began her reign.

Another guest too was there whom Margaret did not expect. Valentin von Broderode, just arrived in England, had hastened at once to Froghambury.

When he saw the merry crowds, the games, the dance, he threw himself impatiently from his slowly advancing carriage, which seemed to him as though it would never top the hill, and, mingling with the groups, he looked on the

scene with wondering curiosity. To him it was incredible, marvellous.

"This Froghambury is a paradise. Is all this power hers? No wonder she had married Dudley. Beside this, no wonder his love had paled, had seemed tame, insipid, worthless."

Standing there, leaning on the stone balustrade, with richly-dressed ladies, fair girls, and gay young men around her, Margaret gazed, well content, on the pageant below. At her side stood the candidate for the pending county election; just beyond was his brother, Lord Brockton of Lees. To them the scene was full of interest. They watched anxiously the human tide, noting well the labours of their supporters and of their foes. The ebb and flow was seen easily by a practised eye. Just below, on the broad gravelled walk, the crowd of idlers lounged up and down, looking with pardonable curiosity up to the group above them, and scanning their faces as though they were looking on superior beings. Here some one moving swiftly by, roughly roused them from their admiration; there some word of political meaning drew their attention from their idle scrutiny.

On the wide green terrace below, the steps were becoming faster and faster; the musicians

were catching the infection, and all were hurrying with more frolic than with just measure and dignity through the mazes of the dance. The bright colours of the girls' dresses glinted gaily in the evening sunshine, while the lights and shades seemed to play coquettishly with their smiling faces and swift movements.

Away, beyond all these, beyond the gay dresses and the moving crowd, below the wide terrace, and far from the white tents and flaunting flags, lay the river; this evening it seemed to sleep in its quiet vale. The sunlight did not touch it; it was hidden away, sheltered and as though soothed to sleep by the great overhanging boughs. The murmur of the waterfall is silenced too; just there you catch the white foam through the waving leaves, like passion tumbling away into the limbo of space.

And the opposite hill is in shade—quiet, dark, peaceful, long-lying green shade; the trees on the top seem sentinels on the watch to guard the vale from harm. The evening breeze scarce stirs their tops; to the terrace it comes lightly whispering, just enough to lift a feather here, or a curl there, or to raise the passing colour on some beauty's cheek. Out in the distance, however, in the far-stretching valley beyond, lies the

glorious sunlight; like an emerald shines the grass, and the willows nodding by the blue water's edge seem to bask in it resplendent. Pure, shining, glorious; a picture of brilliant gladness, of joyful rest; light after darkness, rest after toil, heaven after the murmurs, unrest, effort, and unsatisfying joy of earth.

Something of this passed through Margaret's mind ere she brought back her gaze to the moving crowd below.

"Margaret, an old friend has come whom you will be glad to see."

It was her husband's voice. She turned quickly, and the little group around her made room for the new-comer. It was Valentin.

"You!" said she gladly, putting out both hands. "I am glad indeed."

Her unembarrassed greeting hurt him more than the triumph which he had been picturing to himself.

"Who is he?" whispered the group to each other.

His handsome face, his foreign manner excited attention.

"Who is he?" asked Lorraine in Margaret's ear.

"An old friend of mine and of Dudley's. He

was with us abroad. He saved my husband's life. Let me introduce him."

So Lady Chester talked to Valentin in German.

Looking at him there, he seemed to bring a wave from the ocean of the past to Margaret. Had she dared she would have told him he had started into her sight like a spirit of the past.

"I am glad you have come to-day," said she presently to him, leaning over the balustrade with him by her side.

"Why? to see your triumph?"

"To see the dawn of my new life. Is it not a bright one?"

They were looking on the gay crowds together.

He hardly understood her. He had thought her life at Froghambury had been always this. For him, the spectres of a disenthroned mother-in-law, and a now far-distant Uncle Teddy, did not exist.

"You told me it would be this. I knew—I expected—and is it happiness?"

"Happiness! oh yes; and there is the good hope of making others happy too."

He was silent. Meanwhile the human wave ebbed and flowed below.

"And this election? Your husband will be chosen, as you said?"

Margaret blushed.

"No; not this time, Valentin. You are in too great a hurry; Rome was not built in a day. We have been abroad. I am but now beginning. Dudley did not stand—did not wish——"

"I see," said he.

But he did not.

What was it like when the last strains of music had died out, when everybody had gone away, and those three were alone?

The great rooms, the many servants, the beautiful house, the many pictures and lovely things scattered about, the shaded lights, and Margaret beautiful as ever, even more beautiful, as more self-possessed, and as the moving spirit of it all, made it fairyland for Valentin.

But what was it for him as the days went on? Bitter, terrible disappointment. Why, what had he expected? Was not Dudley kind, ever present, solicitous for his amusement? Was not Margaret gay, light-hearted, clever, kind as ever? Was not Mr. Tudor at hand? Were there not neighbourly meetings too, to amuse him; parties both in the day-time and in the evening, where Lady Lorraine and Margaret

were the reigning queens, and where both had smiles for him? Ay, smiles! But was that all? Had Margaret's interest, had Margaret's feeling died down to that—a smile, a laugh, a merry jest? Were they all? Had she really thus fulfilled her ideal? had she really learned to love this man? Always her eyes, her hopes, her thoughts seemed fixed on him and his happiness. Was she really content?

And she was not worthy of him. Had she really fallen to his level? Were house and dinners, and horses and dogs, and poultry and cricket all she could care for? Was never the sound of music heard? Were all the arts forgotten? Save for that great dog, who seemed to be her familiar spirit, she seemed to have no eyes, no heart but for Dudley.

"Can one degrade oneself so?" thought he.

In truth he was impatient of her apparent success. Above all, his self-love was wounded that he should be forgotten.

One day, weary and ill at ease, and finding himself alone in the gallery, he sat down to the piano, and sang one song that Margaret used to like.

She was crossing the hall at the time, but hearing it, she stopped suddenly. It brought a flood of tender recollections to her.

She opened the door into the gallery wider, and stood there listening.

A great mirror hung on the wall. Valentin saw her standing there, but he sang on.

What was it that the song brought to her? Why did the tears gather in her eyes? What was in the mist before her? What did she see as she stood there? What tenderness came over her and unmanned her so suddenly?

It was the tender dream of her youth that came back to her; it was the whisper of the glory with which she had once crowned life; it was the hopes she had found false, the love she had abjured; it was her own youthful faith for which the tears gathered so fast; it was compassion for herself, regret for the vanished dream that held her spell-bound there.

If she had known then what reality was, what life was—— Alas! songs are poetry, life is prose!

A step behind her made her start. It was Dudley.

"What are you doing here?" asked he.

"Listen, Dudley," said she, putting up her hand. "That is one of the old songs. Do you remember it?"

"Can't say I do. But then I have no ear; no more than Fritz."

"I am not sure that Fritz has not an ear."

Dudley went into the gallery, and Margaret slipped away. But Valentin had seen her tears; he was half content.

"Where is your wife?" asked he, carelessly.

"She has gone to her boudoir."

"Where is that?"

"Like to see it?"

"Yes; as I helped to furnish it, I should."

"She said that was one of the old songs you used to sing."

"Did she? I dare say it is; I have not learnt many new ones."

Margaret meanwhile had slipped away. The song had made her dream.

"Oh, Fritz," said she, as she came into her room, and stood looking at the great dog who lay on the rug, and flapped his tail lazily at her coming, looking at her with dumb devotion, "if you could only sing, it would be so nice; or if Dudley would sing, or just if somebody would do something; it is dreadful to be alone."

Fritz got up and came to her.

"No; I am not alone, I know; I am ungrateful to say so. But, Fritz, you cannot sing; you know you can't. How does my picture look to-day?"

She went to the easel, and turned the picture facing her.

A simple subject: two children sitting under a chestnut tree, making daisy chains. The flickering light played on them; some old people sitting on a bench looked on and laughed.

Just then the door opened, and Dudley brought in Valentin.

"He said I might come," said Valentin, looking at her narrowly.

"Surely, you have every right. To you I am indebted for half the pretty things here."

"Did you like them? How well I remember going to buy that with your mother. And that table, did you like it?"

He scrutinized everything. It brought back to his memory a time full of doubt and pain.

"But this cabinet?" asked he, suddenly. "We did not buy that."

"No; it was in the house. Dudley put it in my room."

"Ah! I thought not. It is too valuable. Fond as I am of antiquities, I should never have dared. Have you any more like it?"

"There is one in Sir Gilbert's room, I believe," said Dudley. "I have a faint recollection of it. But the room has never been opened since his

death. If you are not afraid of ghosts we might go and see."

"I am not afraid of ghosts," said Valentin.

"I have never been inside the room," said Margaret; "I have always thought it was a sort of Bluebeard's chamber."

"Will you both come with me if I go and get the key?" asked Dudley.

"Certainly," said Valentin.

"Yes," said Margaret..

Dudley went away, and Valentin, with his face turned from Margaret, still scrutinized the pictures, the china, the furniture.

He was thinking of her tears; he was sure now she only wore a mask.

"And so you liked the room?"

"Yes. I have often thanked you for this pretty nest. It was like coming home, when I could not arrange the rest of the house as I wished."

Her tone was totally free, quite unembarrassed.

Then he came to the picture.

"And so you paint still?" asked he, astonished.

"Why not?"

"I thought—I did not know you cared for anything except your country life. I thought that all *that* was forgotten."

"It could never be really forgotten with me," said she. Then she added in a lower voice, "It is my life."

"And poetry and music?" asked he; "are those your life still?"

"Yes; as much as ever. But that part of my life is solitary, and I find it must be so. I used to think that all art required sympathy, congeniality; but now I have learnt differently. Art herself gives the sympathy which I used to think was necessary for her worship."

"Are you speaking the truth?"

"Yes;" but she turned away from him as she spoke. "But I find I am two women. The working-woman, who is busy about art, truth, beauty, energy, work, success—life in fact with all its seriousness and earnestness; and the other woman busy about her husband and her friends, about folly and frivolity, whose foolishness amuses them. With this last woman you have to do."

"But if I prefer the other? That other, you know, is my old friend."

Margaret looked at him questioningly.

"It might be better for you to forget," stammered she.

"But if I cannot forget, no more than you

can? Margaret, throw away that hideous mask you have worn before me of late. Do you think I did not see your tears just now?"

"Tears!" repeated she, astonished.

"Yes; when I sang that old song of ours——"

"Ah!"

Then they were both silent for a moment.

"Valentin," said she at last, gravely, "you mistook."

"I am mistaken?"

He started away angrily.

"My dear friend," said she, smiling sadly, "the tears came, I know not why; they came, I think——"

"Now be true, Margaret, to your own self at least."

"They came I think for that poor own self. The words and the tones brought back to me the folly of years ago——"

"Folly!"

"The foolish dreams, the more foolish faith, the proud self-confidence, the idle self-love. They came too for the pain the waking cost. Have you not learnt all that yet, Valentin? But perhaps you were not so foolish as I——"

"I do not understand what you mean——"

"That confounded key!" said Dudley, bursting in; "I have been all this time finding it. Did you think I was never coming?"

"No. All right, Dudley. May Fritz come too?"

"He'll have his own way, I suppose."

"Then of course he will come."

All along the corridor, then down the steps, through the winding passage, and when they came to the door they lowered their voices, none knew why. What a cold, damp feeling there was in the room! What a dim mysterious light came through the chinks of the shutters! What weird shadows seemed to shrink fearfully away as Dudley undid the bars and let in the honest light of day!

There stood the old tester bed, with its faded hangings, there was the inlaid work on it, and the canopy, with the crest and the armorial bearings, getting faint and dim.

There, close by the great fire-place, was the old arm-chair.

"Oh, I wish he were alive still," said Margaret.

"Why?" asked Dudley.

"Because I am sure he was kind and just, and I should have liked to have known him."

"You are not worldly," said Valentin.

There was the old oak chest, which had been for years untold in that same place. There was the old cupboard, there the tall glass, with its gilded frame, and there in the corner was the cabinet which they had come to see.

"There it is," said Dudley, carelessly.

"Ah, it is indeed," said Valentin, enthusiastically. "What a gem it is! May I open it?"

"Oh, open as much as you like."

The drawers were all empty; he might open them all safely.

How beautifully it was inlaid; how rare the workmanship.

"It beats the one in your room. Why do you not have it instead, or as well?"

"May I, Dudley?"

"I don't know. Look; he is like a child with a new toy. What madness it is. It is like Margaret over her old pots and pans. The uglier and older the china is, the more she likes it. I tell you what, old fellow, I had much rather do with it, instead of putting it in Margaret's room, where there is not a corner for anything more."

"What?" asked Valentin, looking up at him and putting out his arm as though to shield it from some proposed sacrilege of the Goths and of Dudley.

"Why! give it to you!"

"Give it to me?"

"Yes; you seem to like it."

"Like it! But this is an heir-loom."

"Heir-loom, indeed! They are all over the house, and fusty things they are. That grate is an heir-loom, I suppose, and so is the chair."

"What does your wife say?"

"Do have it, Valentin."

"Yes; do take it, old fellow. It may grace your castle near Berlin, and will be a souvenir of your English friends. Do take it. It may be a curiosity too over there. Here we have lots of them."

"But you don't know what you are giving me?"

"Oh yes, I do. We will have it packed carefully and sent over."

Valentin was profuse with his gratitude.

"It will grace my collection of *objets d'art* indeed. It will be the most valued of all my valuables."

"I am so glad it will be appreciated," said Dudley. "It is a curious thing."

"It is a beautiful thing," said Valentin, "and a thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

"I say, old gal," said Dudley later to his

wife, "you did not mind my giving it to him?"

"Mind, no; I am delighted. He seemed so pleased. And he really seems to value the gift so much."

"What a fuss he will make about packing it properly."

"Yes; we must get some one down from London to do it all right, and send it for him."

"Yes; I will see to it."

So the golden days sped on. May glided away, and June came in all the blazing glory of his majesty.

Valentin, sitting there in the great hall amid the old books, or lost in dreams about the old pictures as the loving light of heaven poured on them, would see Margaret pass to and fro before him.

Or now it was her voice he listened to, giving some order, or speaking some kindly word. Or she sang to the great organ in the gallery, deeming herself alone. It thrilled through Valentin, as he would sit thinking there.

Or now he watched her from the terrace, tending her flowers; moving amidst them, she seemed the fairest flower herself, to whom all turned as to their sun. And not the flowers

only, but the poor people, the dumb animals, all nature seemed to turn to Margaret and there find solace and comfort. She seemed to breathe happiness around, and on her brow was contentment written.

And with the rest Dudley turned to her too.

Valentin alone seemed left out.

He noticed how she was for ever throwing him with Dudley, how in the evening when they were sitting on the terrace under the stars, how she would glide away, and would go and sing to herself.

At length one day, finding her sitting alone by the fountain in the shade, with Fritz by her side and a book on her knee, he said to her—

"You like to be alone, Queen Daisy?"

"I am a great deal alone, Valentin; necessarily so."

"But why?"

"Dudley does not care very much about the things I care for. I cannot help it. But he is very kind. And I am very happy. Only of course I am a great deal alone. He is out so much. He knows the farmers about, and they amuse him."

"But I care for the things you care for."

"Ah yes; I know."

"Margaret, I do not think you are quite right yet about this life of yours. You say you are contented, and indeed you seem so."

"I am content. I am progressing. Is not that content?"

"You set yourself a task. But to me there is too much of task-work about it, not enough heart-service. You do things because they are right, not because you love them. You keep half your life a closed book from Dudley, because you think it would not interest him, and you set yourself up on a pedestal. Take care that you do not climb so high that he might not care to follow you, but might seek his amusements with his farmers and such associates he can find at hand."

"What would you have me do?"

"Let us all see that closed book. I would not have you put it away on a shelf, and give up art and all the enjoyment it gives you, lest you too might fall to a lower level,—a level where Dudley is content,—but admit others to your sanctuary."

Margaret was silent.

The advice was subtle.

But her mind was busied with one sentence in it. Had she in fact set herself too high? might Dudley some day not care to follow? In truth,

he did frequent the farmers' company much more than at first, and Mr. Tudor had thrown out hints which she had not noticed at the time, but which now recurred to her mind with strange force. What, after all, if she should not be succeeding as she thought?

The fountain splashed on, and threw out its darts of flame in the sunshine.

Valentin watched her face.

"Are you coming, oh serpent," said she with sudden gaiety, "to dash the happiness of my Eden from my hand?"

"You often push away a disagreeable subject like that," said he, sullenly. "It is rather mean, I think."

"Well, you shall come to my sanctuary, then —and Dudley too. But I forewarn you—it is very dull."

She rose as she spoke, and he walked with her to the house.

Outside the little garden door he stopped her, standing facing her.

"One word, Margaret. Answer me truly. Are you happy?"

Behind her the flowers blazed, the trees nodded, the birds darted swiftly about. Behind that, again, the park rolled away into the blue distance.

She seemed to him a priestess holding a scroll. From the word she should speak his life would be coloured.

For a moment her hand rested on Fritz's head, for a moment her eye met his unshrinkingly.

"Perfectly, thoroughly happy. Valentin, how can you ask?"

He turned away. His heart felt bitter, scorched, wounded.

"Perfectly, thoroughly happy!"

But he did not believe it.

CHAPTER V.

We may not make this world a Paradise
By walking it together with clasped hands,
And eyes that meeting feed a double strength.
Mrs. Hemans.

Sometimes hath the brightest day a cloud ;
And after summer evermore succeeds
Barren winter, with his wrathful, nipping cold ;
So cares and joys abound, as seasons fleet.
Second Part of Henry VI., Act ii. Sc. 4.

An earthly Paradise indeed !

Margaret shut herself up no longer in her "sanctuary," as Valentin had jestingly called it ; she saw no longer need to be solitary ; it had been a mistaken idea.

"One should never leave people at their own level ; one should raise them higher, if it may be possible."

She left the chrysalis state ; she shone in all the glorious splendour of the butterfly.

Songs, painting, poetry gave the hours wings; they vanished, and suddenly waking to their flight,

Margaret and Valentin would ask whither had they gone.

Dreams—dreamed as Valentin rowed her on the lake, or as the boat crept along almost silently, —and gorgeous fancies swept across their sky; visions of earthly glory, half divine, to be wrought by art; images wherein Valentin's thoughts, peopled with half the myths and the presences of old poetic classic lore, painted pictures for her, only too entrancing, only too beautiful.

In those early summer days the air was heavy with fragrance, all nature seemed to breathe love. Margaret and Valentin looked on and listened.

Was there no poison in it? Were the darting swift, or the changing reflections in the lake, or the magnificent sweep of the beautiful trees, or the myriad life filling the air around them, or the splendour of sky or flower, all that Valentin marked?

As he poured forth his brilliant fancies in Margaret's ear, as he noted her brightening eye and flushing cheek, as he heard her eager answers, were those all he thought of? Did not his memory go back, with sudden fierce, impotent longing, to the days at Sonnenthal so sweetly spent? Why had their beauty faded thus?

And yet Margaret was more wonderful to him

now than she was then. Now it came to him often suddenly that she did not care for him. Then she had cared; he had taught her, as it were; he had opened her eyes, and she had seen all as he saw it, and loved all because he did. Now she saw with her own eyes; and those eyes were always fixed on the blue distance, or on the blue sky, or on some picture, not on his face, as of old; and her ear was strained to catch some harmony, not the tones of his voice, as of old.

"Is it possible?" he would say to himself bitterly.

Suddenly Margaret roused herself from this dreamland. Inaction was abhorrent to her nature. If she had no work immediately on hand, she must have amusement. Dudley, she thought, wanted stirring. The neighbourhood wanted to be amused. And she and Valentin, she fancied, might as well have something to do.

"Dudley says I may," said she, playfully, one morning at breakfast.

"What?" asked Valentin.

"Live again; I mean act."

He laughed.

So did Dudley; and the latter touched his forehead significantly, as though he would say Margaret was a little gone in that quarter.

"We have got our play all ready," said she.

Dudley started.

"Have you?"

"Oh yes. Scenes—casket scenes from the 'Merchant of Venice;' easy as possible: an old dream of mine. And the Powyses always promised to play them. Then Mr. Wemyss is sure to have a new play he wants to see on the stage, and Orford Ellis will only be too glad to help him. I shall write to-day. I wonder if Lady Lorraine would act. We might have it the beginning of July, I should think?"

"What shall I do?" asked Dudley.

"Oh, you must receive the people. Somebody must do that."

"And I?"

"I don't see why you should not play Bassanio. You are the best looking," and she examined his features critically, as though he were a picture or a statue.

"I am not sure whether my leave may not be up by that time," said he, getting up angrily from the table.

But Margaret was as good as her word. Preparations began in earnest. Lady Lorraine said she would like to feel young again, and to act once more. She would get some lessons in

London, and would work up "Nerissa" with all her might. Miss Powys would play Jessica. Valentin too would play Bassanio. As for the rest, "Margaret's professionals," as she called them, were they not always willing to try their hands at anything? and of course Mr. Wemyss and Orford Ellis had a little something which they would be delighted to play, with a little help from the honourable lady, the lessee of the theatre.

The country-side was in a ferment at the news. No "theatricals" had ever been seen in the neighbourhood before. Was Lady Vane really clever enough to act; and Shakspere too! But then perhaps her antecedents were—— By the by, what were her antecedents?

There was something forward, unfeminine in a lady's acting; Shakspere too! were they not right?

Then came the news that Lady Chester was going to act too. Oh dear! was it true? was it really true?

And would every one be asked? Would the invitations be managed properly, according to people's proper rank and position, and according to the time they had been in the county?

Lady Vane, a new-comer, and half a foreigner, might forget that.

So they talked and fretted, and hoped and feared among themselves.

As for Valentin, he paced up and down the terrace at Froghambury with a pocket Shakspere, and quoted his "Bassanio" till nearly every servant in the house knew the part as well as he did.

"Did ever any one hit on anything so engrossing to occupy a stray guest before?" asked Margaret of Fritz, as she watched the young man pacing up and down with his book from her window.

"Margaret," said Dudley, opening the door suddenly, "here is a wretched man come from London calling himself a stage-carpenter."

"Oh!" said she, springing up, "you don't mean to say so! a stage-carpenter! then now I really do feel as if we were going to do something. I am quite happy."

Dudley stood laughing at her.

"Come here," said she. And she brought him to the window, then pointed at Valentin conning his book in the garden below.

They stood together, smiling at him.

"He is very constant to you, Queen Daisy," said Dudley, turning to her gravely at length.

"You think so?" answered she as gravely.

"Then I am very faithless to him. You must make it up to him for me. He is our good friend, Dudley. Be one to him."

Her husband's arm was round her. A mist seemed to gather over his eyes. For answer his lips rested lightly on her head. Just then Valentin looked up; he saw the action.

Margaret knew he saw it; and she was glad. She did not know the bitterness that shot to his heart at the sight. Is anything so bitter as wounded pride, as hurt self-love?

"I will come to the carpenter at once, Dudley," said she.

But she stayed a moment behind her husband, and kneeling, looked into the depths of Fritz's faithful brown eyes.

"What was the story of Actea?" murmured she. "She loved a beast, and her love was to her a god. Is it always so? How it purifies us and the loved one when it is so. There is nothing that is possible, or that has any beauty in it, without faith. Can love raise a beast to a god thus?"

Was she thinking of poor patient Fritz, or Nero, or of Dudley?

"If I might raise him so, if I could make him see and love only what is true and beautiful, if by

my love I could bring him to the truth—— Come, Fritz."

Then she went to the stage-carpenter.

That month of June, 1870, will long be remembered in the precincts of Froghambury. What a fuss it was! What hammering, what fitting! What confusion, dear to the development of histrionic talent, but hateful to everything else! What sudden hurry and indispensable necessity for indispensable things which had never been heard of before! What endless wants, what infinite and impotent needs!

Moreover, what rehearsals! What jumbling together of the tragic and the comic, of the humorous and the pathetic! What strange touches of human nature strangely allied with divine inspiration and human inspiration! What enthusiasm, and what crude ignorance! What effort and what impotence! Again, what journeyings to and fro between Froghambury and London! What nocturnal arrivals! What sudden departures! How many telegrams! And how many answers and porterage prepaid! What ridiculous questions! What hopelessly indefinite answers! What an "Inferno" for every one except to those to whom it was "Paradiso!"

Dudley was supposed to be the sufferer. But

Dudley was out all day. As Margaret sapiently remarked—

"Has he not the terriers to talk to? And then there are the ferrets, not counting the horses and the farm; and then there is a certain Bill Ealing, an authority with one eye and an evil red face, with whom Dudley consorts much, and who I fancy must be very fascinating, though I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance myself."

The golden days sped on. People came and went. Rehearsals began and never ended. Life, they said, was full of work. But the summer days were glorious. The actors lounged about and basked in the sunshine, and Lady Lorraine, with Portia and Jessica, looked on and laughed.

"Oh, Valentin," said Margaret one day with sudden enthusiasm, "I wish you lived here. Throw up your German army and come. We will build a theatre and play Shakspere always, and we will have an opera, and a studio; and what great things we will do, and how many people we will encourage, and how we will love art, and how many we will make happy."

"Is that all why you wish me to come?" asked he, smiling at her doubtfully.

"Is not that enough?" asked she, smiling

back, and opening her great round eyes upon him.

At last the great night came.

Froghambury was full of guests.

Had not Mrs. Vane been prevailed upon to come, and to bring Lilly, even though she disliked acting, and had been heard to call Margaret "a daughter of Heth," and a Midianitish woman? Had not Mrs. Hoffman also come? and were not some old friends also there, who had been kind to Margaret in London, admiring her face, and liking her talent?

Then there were many guests from Carlingsford, and as for the neighbourhood, why it scrambled in confusedly, eagerly, hotly. It had made up its mind to come. It came, it said, under protest. But the protest was faint, the arrival evident enough.

Outside, the carriages streamed wearily up the hill. The moon peeped at them through the trees; her gentle gleam seemed mild mockery on their feverish excitment.

Outside the great hall the coloured lights flared and shone; blue and green and red were there—a *parterre* of jewels set in the silver grass.

Within, great lamps threw down their light on the armour, and on the deer's heads, and on the

glistening swords; shone too on the old carving, and seemed to nestle with gentle smile in the cornices where the Cupids laughed.

There too in the corners bright flowers waved; their large leaves hung to the ground. Was it all a joke? were they too laughing? or was there no feigning in the love they breathed, and the soft welcome they gave to the flocking guests?

Old Douglas was supreme. It was years since he had assisted at such an entertainment; it was years, he said, since he had seen Froghambury look itself. For two days before he had tried his voice in the housekeeper's room for Mrs. Simeon's edification, to see if he could announce the people properly. He too, poor Douglas, must go through his rehearsals! Surely that was a new waistcoat he had on. Never had he looked so portly, so blooming before.

"Why, Douglas!" said Margaret as "Portia," meeting him on the stairs, "why, Douglas! you look quite young again."

"And, ma'am, I feel so."

Then he stood dazzled by her beauty and condescension.

At last the guests were seated, at last the supreme moment arrived, at last the manager's

silvery bell was heard, and the curtain went up. There was a burst of applause.

The lights, the flowers, the well-chosen colouring —how pretty the effect! how charming the result!

"Who taught her to play Portia like that?" asked one.

"Was there ever such by-play, such charm of manner, such talent, such fascination?"

"I would I were Bassanio," said another.

"He is a professional, I suppose?"

"But she must be a professional too," said an old lady, crustily. "I dare say she has been on the stage."

"Depend upon it that was why Mrs. Vane objected to the marriage so."

"That must have been it."

"But is she not charming? How arch, how tender, how beautiful."

"Oh, if Shakspere could rise and see he might sleep for ever after, content that his conception was understood at last."

"But look at Nerissa. I had no idea Lady Chester was such an actress."

"Look at her husband watching her over there. Is he not pleased?"

"We shall all turn actresses now. It will be dreadful Oh, these days—these days."

And Jessica too was in no way behind; the applause was as hearty for her.

For the men there was sharper criticism.

Bertram Powys' "Shylock" had something of original, though strangely powerful, in it; and Lorenzo and Gratiano provoked many an approving smile.

"After all, am I not right to act Shakspere?" asked Margaret behind the scenes, as she listened to the storm of applause she had provoked.

"They will go home and read up their 'Merchant of Venice' now."

"They all say they do not wonder at your choosing Bassanio," said Lady Lorraine; "he is so handsome."

"Who told you they said so?"

"Chester. He has just been round."

"They are very stupid, ignorant people. I dare say half of them think I like him because he is handsome, not because Shakspere settled it so."

"Yes; like people who read novels, say the author thinks all his characters say, never mind what sort of people they are."

At last—too soon for the actors—it was over.

The judge had come on, the judgment had been given, Shylock had said he was "not well," Portia and Nerissa were happy once more, they

had tantalized their respective play-husbands sufficiently, and all was over.

The curtain had dropped, and the actors were listening smiling to the excitement among the audience.

Then cries of "Portia" resounded, and she was led forward.

Strange! amid all the friendly faces gathered there on one alone did her eye dwell. It was to Dudley she looked, it was to Dudley she smiled, and when he smiled back proudly on her, her heart swelled with sudden triumph, and she felt glad as she had never felt before.

In turn they were all called, and so, amid applause and shouts and wondering admiration, the Venetian Merchant left the little Frogham-bury stage.

"There is something odd about it though," said an old lady; "something mysterious."

"She is too good an actress to be a lady."

"And yet she is so lady-like."

"One cannot help being a little shocked."

"Such cleverness frightens me."

But there was not much time to talk.

Mr. Wemyss' new piece followed: a little comic piece, called "My Morning Visitors," through

which he and Orford Ellis and Margaret kept the audience in screams of laughter.

Afterwards at supper in the great oak dining-room, with every one sitting down at little round tables, and the champagne corks flying about, with actors and actresses mingling their gay costumes with the more sober dresses of the guests, was it not gay? Had Froghambury ever seen such a merry scene?

Mrs. Vane might try to wedge in innuendoes, or Lilly might look astonished, and ask "who all these people were," what did it matter? was not every tongue unloosed? and did not every face wear perforce some sort of smile?

"How did you come to do Portia so well?" asked an old lady of Margaret.

"I don't know. I have always loved Portia. It has been my dream to act the part ever since I can remember."

Now is that right? should not a young wife think of her household, her husband, his dinner? What has Portia to do with daily life?

"Ah, dear old lady!" Margaret might have said, "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Just then Valentin stepped up to her. He

was pale, but he was smiling. There was a strange light in his eye.

"Well, Bassanio," said she, half smiling and half afraid, she did not know why.

He stooped towards her.

"It is all over. I must go."

"Go!"

"Yes," he repeated. "I must go."

She had risen. She could not understand him. They stood facing each other.

"Explain."

"War is declared."

"War," she stammered.

"Against France. I must go."

Her heart stood still. Her face turned white.

A wild joy gleamed in his eyes.

"You—are—going—to—fight?"

"Yes," said he, brutally.

In truth he was glad that she cared, that she could suffer for him. It was not Germany's sorrow that made him glad; though, for the matter of that, who would not be glad to fight a good fight for his country's sake?

"You?" she repeated, half stupid.

She looked at him from head to foot.

This handsome youth to go and be shot down, to be mauled and wounded and torn like

any savage, and all for nothing he had done, for no quarrel or fault of his; to fight like any wild beast, or, worse still, to stand like any martyr and not fight, and yet die thus! Oh, it was sickening.

And for Valentin to have to do this! He so bright, so clever, so intellectual; he who knew so much, he who could enjoy so much, he who could love so well,—he to die in a senseless, brutal fight! Was this justice? Was this the law of nations? Who had the right to take a human life and waste it thus?

"Do not you hear? do not you understand?" asked he softly.

"No, I do not understand."

Her face was whiter than ever; her teeth were firm clenched. Then it got noised about the room that Bassanio was ordered off to Germany, that war was declared, that the Government was making up the complement of the regiments, that all the officers were ordered to the front, that—in fact, Bassanio must go.

Margaret roused herself, and smiled.

How they gathered round him. Men and women, old and young; friends well known to him, or those who had only seen him as Bassanio to-night. He was the hero of the hour. There

were tears in some of the women's eyes. He was too handsome to go and fight.

"Is he not too handsome, Lady Vane?" asked some one of her.

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Margaret, smiling; but she watched him, seeking to know what to do.

As for him, he laughed and joked, he carried it off well. He was, they thought, all eagerness to fight. Perhaps in his heart he was; and yet he was modest. No idle swagger of courage; no, he might be dead in a week. Yet still he turned with friendly jest to Antonio his play-friend, and asked him if he would not see him through this trouble too.

Looking at Margaret, he feared her. He watched her narrowly. She was not near him; she looked at him through the crowd, and their eyes talked a dull, pained, bewildered, unintelligible language to each other.

She was like a woman dreaming an evil dream.

He was awake and was waiting for her.

"Good-bye, Queen Daisy."

He stood before her, and the world—her world—was looking on.

"Must I say it now?" she stammered. Then

Dudley was there too. She added indifferently, "You go now?"

"Yes, now; good-bye, Queen Daisy."

"You mean you go early in the morning?"

"No, to-night. My things are packed. The carriage is waiting."

"Good-bye, Valentin."

There was an infinite longing in her face to say more.

"Is that all?" muttered he.

"Heaven bless you," said she.

There was no harm in that.

For a moment their hands were clasped together.

"Good-bye, Bassanio," she said, aloud. "Go with him, Dudley; you, Valentin——" she added.

But no; he was gone.

"She did not care for her play-lover," said the guests. "She is hard, and beautiful, and cold."

"She did not care for me ever," said Valentin bitterly to himself, as he drove away in the starlight night. "She is beautiful as marble, and as cold."

Would the guests never go? would they never cease their thanks, their compliments, their flattery? would she never be alone? Yes, at last, after weary waiting, after weary acting, after dull jests, and duller phrases, at last alone.

The blue silent vault of heaven above her; and on the earth, and in her heart, a great cry of pain that seemed so bitter, so heavy that it must kill her.

Her Germany! her fatherland! her friend!

Her heart's one friend whom she had loved and worshipped, and betrayed till she had taught herself to love another in his place; her heart's home, where her soul was always sighing to be, on the blue Rhine with the dear old father. Her heart's home, her heart's friend, and she alone and idle here.

Would the moon never hide her smiling face? Would the stars never cease their vain watch?

Must she always do nothing?

Must he fight for Germany, perhaps die for Germany, and she stand idle here?

And this was Margaret Vane.

They said she was cold and hard.

CHAPTER VI.

War, war is still the cry: war even to the knife.
Childe Harold, Canto I.

Was it the same nation? Were they the same people? Who said they were quiet or phlegmatic?

What is this joy, this enthusiasm, this breaking out of a long pent-up want? Each face beams with sudden content, each man steps as though he walked to a long-wished-for goal; triumphant gladness seems already to be each one's possession. Courage and honour revel abroad; self-constraint is at an end; smouldering anger is over; now the Fatherland's day has come; they may fight, they may conquer, and they may die.

The memorable day, the 15th of July, 1870, had dawned, and war was declared.

Valentin, hurrying back, journeyed like a man in a dream. He too shared the joy, the proud burst of martial spirit; the love of country made

his heart beat fiercely, while the crowd of soldiers he met everywhere, and the reservists flocking to join their regiments added to his excitement. The solitary sparks coming from all sides to join their standard met in the lurid flame. What hurry, confusion, and excitement everywhere. They came, these eager defenders of their country, mostly before they had been called, and their numbers were so great there was no place for them, but they had to bivouack in the streets, or find shelter where they could.

Nor did they ask, these willing victims, what it all meant. Their King's honour was at stake: so was not theirs? The Fatherland needed them,—the boundary, the glorious Rhine needed them and their defence against their next neighbour.

And France must be ready. She had invited them to war; she had provoked the combat; she must be ready. Probably her columns were already moving towards the Rhine, and they would come before Prussia was prepared.

Hence the hurry. Yet no one was afraid. No one doubted the greatness of France or the bravery of her soldiers, but if only the Prussian army could once gain its position, no one feared the result.

Who could be afraid in the midst of such

joy? Who could have time for any regret, or doubt, or any sad thought of the past when new life was springing in every heart, and new hopes beamed on every face; when glory seemed to light with new promises on every sword, and when courage throbbed high in every breast.

Was it for Valentin even to dream in the long lonely night—too long, for all inaction was hateful then—of blighted hopes and love betrayed? Was that the time for regret over vain hopes and idle dreams, of faded friendship, or of idols crumbled away? Was there place even then for bitterness? Did he dream even then of a wasted past, of idle faith, of misplaced confidence, and of fruit forbidden? Did his wounded self-love poison his heart even now? Was there a thought that the battle-field might give him an honourable peace at last? Was he even now so bitter? Did he welcome death, and wounds, and suffering, and eternal silence because all other revenge was denied him? Now because she was lost to him had Margaret become so dear? Before, if he had been less cruel, less selfish, if he had not flirted thus with happiness, he might have had it for the asking.

But there had been no thought, no pity in him; only selfish pride, only love of power, and of idle

dalliance. He had had no pity; and now he suffered.

Life held no more beauty for him. Margaret had forgotten, Margaret was false (he said), at any rate she was cold, and he courted death. Dead, agonized, killed, she would pity him, would love him once more. A poor revenge to say the best of it.

But impotence catches at any straw. He who had believed wholly in the necessity of earthly happiness, he who had always thought fortune must smile upon him, had come to this.

Then Lotta came to him, when he was there at his own solitary home near Berlin, and while he was making his few hurried preparations before going to fight. Lotta Senden came to him, with her old love, as tender as of yore, spurned though it had been, and forgotten by him as his had been by another. Lotta came and stood beside him, with renewed passion in her soul, and trembling for him when the battle should begin. Lotta came and looked into his eyes and sought for the tenderness she could not find.

Alas for her! His soul turned sick within him, and bitterness took hold of him with tenfold strength as he thought of the smiles of another so sternly withheld.

He flung himself away roughly, he shut himself up in his rooms that were so full of artistic and beautiful objects, he felt a sort of delirium as he thought how powerless they all were to give him happiness; they were not life; they were mere dressed-out dust; he longed for death.

Presently his eye fell on a great packing-case standing in a corner. He went to it with a sort of dull, instinctive curiosity. It had come from England. It was directed to him, Valentin. The writing on the card was Dudley Vane's.

Valentin rang the bell.

"When did this come?" asked he of the servant.

"Some days ago. It is from England, mein herr."

"Have it opened," said Valentin, listlessly.

He stepped out into the garden, lit a cigar, and paced up and down while it should be opened.

A remembrance from Froghambury, a breath from Margaret's home; the last evidence he would have of her before he died. Just now he hugged the idea to his heart that he would die. He longed for rest; he longed to end this existence that had no happiness in it at all.

The night was far advanced when he came in again.

There facing him stood the old cabinet that he had admired so much. Dudley had been true to his promise and had sent it. How pathetically it struck Valentin, uprooted thus from its old home, standing here in the beauty of its workmanship a monument of the faded past.

It brought a flood of recollections back to him. The bright garden at Froghambury and the sleeping lake below; the day when he had sung to Margaret, his introduction to her boudoir, and the picture of the two happy children; above all, Margaret standing there with the great dog beside her. It was an idyll in itself.

Then the visit to the death-chamber, and the weird shadows flitting to and fro. The memory of the old man, the faded arm-chair, the tester-bed, and the curious, beautiful cabinet. It seems now to be talking to him, to be telling Valentin the story.

Once more he pictures them again to himself—Margaret and Dudley; their home-life, their wealth, the happiness of possession, her aspirations, her ideals, her efforts after continual progress; then the play-night, her beauty, her success; then again, going back a few days, the

kiss Dudley had given her as they stood at the window.

It was all true. It was no dream. Here was the old cabinet in proof of it.

And yet once she had let him think she loved him.

Mechanically he began to study the old cabinet; a little bit of workmanship here, an inlaid piece of ivory there; here a coloured marble, and there a grotesque carving.

Mechanically he pulled out the drawers, lingeringly his hand rested on the little nooks and crevices. Margaret had the fellow to it. Did she too open the many little hiding-places often? did she too put her little treasures within? and did she ever inspect it curiously, and imagine the workman's story as she studied?

Had she ever woven the web of fancy as now he was fain to do? Had she time in her happy life?

Suddenly, unconsciously, without warning or thought, he touched a spring, and out flew a hidden drawer. He started back astonished, then half smiled at the workman's whim. A curious little secret drawer enough. At the bottom lay a crumpled paper.

He took it, wondering.

"Had it been any one else, it might be money. But Sir Gilbert was no miser by all accounts."

No; it was not money.

But it was something that sent the blood up into Valentin's cheek, and then left it blanched and white.

It was Sir Gilbert's last will.

"If Dudley marry Margaret he is disinherited."

And there below were the signatures—Walpole Mortimer and John Douglas.

Why had they not spoken? Why had the power of speech come to him, Valentin?

He read it over and over. He could not believe it; he could not understand it.

And then it all flashed upon him. They were in his power.

A moment ago he had sighed for revenge. Here it was; perfect, complete. Destruction of this envied happiness, as swift, as certain as he could wish. If Margaret had married Dudley for his wealth—well, if she had loved him for his wealth, now Valentin would strip him of it.

A moment ago he had longed for death. Now—oh no; now how dearly he prized his life, that he might keep it, that only he might live till he could go and confront them and——

No; the thought was given no form, no shape.

He did not know what he would do; only he knew he had them in his power, and he must keep his life to use that power.

Suppose he were to die before he could get back to England; suppose they should not know; suppose he could not face her with his triumph. No writing would do; he must see, must enjoy——

The love of life beat high in his heart once more.

Still dreaming of his triumph when the pale dawn stole in, chafing against his fetters that bound him to Germany for the moment, longing to fight and to conquer, but longing for that other sweeter revenge too; thus influenced, he set forth for the war.

Close to his heart was the old man's will, sewn in safe. If he died, it might die too, be lost, blood-stained, or pierced with a bullet or a sword-thrust; he cared not. But if he lived, it also should come to life. It was his own personal triumph that he wanted.

Margaret should sue to him for mercy.

What a merry departure it was; rather like a wedding march than going forth to die; bands playing, flags flying, drums beating, bright uniforms gleaming in the sun, and crowds cheering the soldiers as they passed.

What enthusiasm greeted them everywhere throughout Germany. From the far east to the Rhine itself was one gay festival. No window but had a glad farewell, no door but showed a smiling face, no house-top hardly but had a handkerchief waving from it. The heart of the people was bursting with the war. Who could but admire and feel proud of the strength put forth so eagerly at last?

Valentin's regiment formed part of the Crown Prince's army; they met near Landau. On the 2nd of August the first shot of the war was fired, and the fierce love of fighting sprang mightily to life in the hearts of the soldiers as they stood face to face once more with death.

Is it for us to follow the ghastly tragedy? Can we lightly call to mind the gay *insouciance* of the French people, the glorious uprising of the Germans? Is it for us to mark the gory path of war? Have not our feelings but too lately been harrowed passionately by the frightful accounts of other fights? has not Europe had its notice turned too loathsomely on human quarrels? have not we heard too much of human suffering? has not the fierce passion of humanity and its bestial cruelty made us hate the tale too deeply? We would be spared.

Let us mark for a moment the gay crowds in the Boulevards of Paris, and the mad enthusiasts who called so ignorantly, "À bas la Prusse," "À bas Bismarck," "Vive la guerre," and "À Berlin," "À Berlin;" nay, let us turn for a second to the other side and call to mind this same Berlin in festival. The crowds cheering and singing the national anthem. "Unter den Linden" illuminated, and the flags flying broadly overhead; the King coming forward to the windows of the palace and repeatedly saluting and thanking the heaving crowd.

For a moment let us call to mind that gay prologue, but for the rest let us draw a veil. Is it in the pages of a novel that we dare to play with such ghastly suffering? Are such mighty sins and such mighty sorrows to be used for childish amusement?

We know the result in these later days, we know on whom victory smiled. Let us spare the details, let us not count the cost.

Meanwhile what happened to Valentin von Broderode? He has disappeared in the gleaming ranks of his countrymen. Let us keep him in sight if we can. If he too shared the glory, he shared also the pain. The bitter, agonizing pangs were his, and his too the fierce joy.

On that 3rd of August when the Crown Prince marched to the frontier with his 120,000 men, Valentin's heart throbbed with mingled emotions. He had seen a young comrade, deeming himself unnoticed, kiss a woman's likeness as he buckled on his uniform, and then he put it near his heart. Valentin envied him. No tender love, no soft memories strengthened his soul; a bitter, blind rage smouldered in his breast. The instrument of destruction against her he had loved was resting on his heart. He was something of a fatalist. If he lived, it was that he should be the instrument of the Vanes' ruin; if he died, well, it was nothing to him.

He was one of the 40,000 men who appeared suddenly on the heights above Schweigen, when the French were eating their breakfast. They might rush to arms, they might fight like lions, but what was that against the steady determination of the Germans? The cannon thundered on, and Weissenburg was doomed. The houses burst out in flames, and the French lay dead and wounded in numbers. France and Europe woke up astonished, and men talked of German decision, of French vacillation.

Valentin stumbled across a dead face he knew when the fighting was over: it was the young

officer he had envied in the morning. He was smiling even in death, and his cold stiff hand grasped the miniature of the woman he had loved.

Valentin turned away in haste. Even then he envied him again. He had been loved, and he was at rest.

The greatest joy for which Valentin dared to hope was revenge.

The contrast was bitter.

Was there any one he loved to pray for him? Was there any to long for his safety? Surely if Margaret could but know his thought, his meditated revenge, she must, on the contrary, wish for his death. Bitter hatred seemed to actuate him which ever way he turned. Slaughter and destruction and ruin and misery seemed the only work he had to do. Destruction and ruin against Dudley, whose life he had once saved so gladly; misery to Margaret for spurning his love; death to the innocent thousands who had come so gaily and so ignorantly to the fight. How grim the outlook beside the bright picture of life which had pleased his boyish fancy; how thickly the shadows had fallen, obscuring the visions he had believed so implicitly. Life had seemed to him as a merry dance, danced now to one air, now to

another, as the fancy willed; stepping from one pleasure to another, with Margaret by his side; and now death and sorrow and suffering glared upon him which ever way he turned.

But what time was there for these thoughts?

The French were burning to revenge Weissenburg, and MacMahon had hurried on to arrest the advance of the enemy. There on the heights the Crown Prince found him, and next day at seven in the morning the battle began.

Nestling in a beautiful valley, that is sheltered on both sides by high ridges of ground, lies Wörth. Since that August morning the name of that quiet little town bears with it a tale of terrible significance. Its smiling pasture-lands seem in vain to try to veil past horrors.

Thick woods clothe the sides of the hills; behind the French army a strip of forest seems to offer cover against the enemy. Below, winding on, till it runs right through the centre of the village, flows the little river Bruder—a silver thread, smiling unconcernedly in the sunshine, while hatred rages on either side. Down the hill-side winds towards it the white high road, and here, stretching far to right and left, have the Germans taken up their position. Here were the spiked helmets dazzlingly bright in the sun, and here the needle-

guns were collected in cart-loads under the trees. Helpless Wörth looked from one side to the other, and through it and around it and over it the battle raged.

Who of those who witnessed the fierce struggle that began when MacMahon threw himself on the 5th Prussian corps can ever forget it? They fought, those two armies, for two hours as if the fate of the world depended on their prowess that day. Then came the since-famous 11th Prussian corps, and the French fell back on the defensive once more. Still their resistance was, as the Crown Prince said, most "obstinate and intense." By three o'clock the French line was broken, and the army was in disorder. Then came, as a forlorn hope, as a last straw to which the French clung, the splendid but mad charge of the gallant cuirassiers, borrowed from Marshal Canrobert's troop. A grand, a glorious advance it was; a blaze of splendour and glory. Grand they were in their beauty, grand too in their destruction. One moment, men looked and saw the pride and exultation of life; the next, horses and men were rolling together by hundreds in the dust, and the awful horror of death blanched the spectators' faces. It was a stupendous act of self-destruction which held thought and speech alike spell-bound.

Our Balaclava charge had taught nothing, and this was even more harmless. The magnitude of the folly shows the magnitude of the defeat and the sore need that urged it.

And so another glorious day ended for Germany. But it was no miracle; indeed its chief glory consisted in that it was a triumph of long and patient preparation, as well as a triumph of brilliant courage and hard fighting. They had beaten a great army of brave soldiers, they had out-fought the bravest fighting, but above all the Crown Prince had out-generalled the ablest French generals. What had patriotism,—albeit deep and earnest and devoted as was that of the German troops,—but what had even their patriotism been without a perfect knowledge of military tactics and a deadly handling of the means at the general's disposal? The despairing and reckless courage of the French was as nothing against the intelligence, dauntless spirit, and discipline of their enemy. Not that the Germans were not slaughtered too. Valentin expected every moment to be his last, as his comrades were mown down on all sides of him, and the bullets whizzed round his head. But his soul was on fire; his only instinct was to advance, his only impulse was to fight. Life was forgotten; death was nothing.

Afterwards, when it was all over, both were present enough; the realities of both were amply vivid. The black Turcos and the wide-trousered Zouaves lay thickly on the ground; the dead cuirassiers lay strewn in ghastly profusion. And on, westward through the wood, went the fearful traces of the fight; men lying as though asleep in the shade, stretched there stiff in the grim arms of death; pools of blood where the wounded had fallen; and dead horses innumerable. The knapsacks, the baggage scattered here and there in the terrible haste, the rifles thrown away; what a tale was told that day! Well might the Germans be proud, well might the wounded lift their pale faces and strive to let the Crown Prince hear their weak voices cheering him as he passed; well might Valentin's heart burst with pride for his countrymen and cry that the Fatherland was safe. Well might he glory in what he had done, in the valour he had shown and shared; well might he wonder at the charmed life which seemed to bear him safely still; and well might he wonder what English friends and English hearts would think of the great victory won that day.

And so the terrible war went on.

The great armies spread over the land.

But how unlike this other fearful war of which

we have read so lately; how our blood runs cold as the pictures of misery and useless human cruelty are pourtrayed before us. In this war of '70-'71 it was, between the fighting, more like the march of a huge triumphal procession than anything else. The girls stood smiling at the cottage doors as they watched the soldiers pass, the wives hastened to bring provisions for which they were duly paid, and the men looked wonderingly at the vast legions still coming, and ever coming still. Their memories flew back to former battles, to former wars, and they wondered as they felt the power and the calm confidence of these quiet Germans.

And so, once more, the war went on. Forbach, Metz; why dwell on the bloody landmarks?

Valentin soon gained distinction and won the Prince's favour. His courage, his quickness were of no ordinary type. He had a smile, a ready hand to help all who came. His comrades and the men under his command soon learned to love and trust him. The Prince put him on his Staff. How brilliant a company it was. Many German princes were there. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, the Prince of Mecklenburg, the Hohenzollern, and many others of high position rode forth with the brave Red Prince. Here, if

possible, Valentin found the activity more incessant than ever. England became dim in his mind, Froghambury a mere speck. Only Margaret's face haunted him. Above the din of battle he seemed to hear her voice sometimes, and her tender, reproachful eyes seemed to be following him. Then he would feel for the will; and, tormented with doubt and indecision, now demoralized by the scenes he had to pass through, he would vow to use it against these former friends; now softened by some sight of individual suffering, he would doom it to destruction and swear to hold his peace. But still he never did destroy it; he kept it, treasuring it passionately.

Terrible days followed. Am I to write of Courcelles, of Vionville? Am I to tell of that famous light cavalry charge of the Prussians on the 16th, alike superior to ours at Balaclava and to that of the French at Wörth, in that it was made with a chance of success? Am I to dwell on heroic feats which make our hearts throb wildly and mantle our cheeks with pride? The Prussians were resolved to conquer or to die. It was no love of excitement, no passing thirst for fleeting glory; it was the stern determination of a long-smouldering pent-up passion which nerved their souls to the fight.

Meanwhile the Goddess of War smiled on Valentin. He was to be one of the conquering host. No dull inaction was to let his sword rust; his eye was not to weary with the absence of the foe. He was to be led forth among those of whom men said later, "They came to make the victory complete!"

It was the 17th. That night wild music rang out. Trumpet answered to trumpet for miles around, and the drums spoke in their deep, rumbling bass. It was the signal for the Borodino of the campaign. Gravelotte was beginning.

There, on a height, watching, stood the great representative men of Prussia. The soldier-king, with his steady gaze, but somewhat plaintive face, as though he hated seeing his children slaughtered; General von Moltke, restless as ever; Prince Adalbert, Prince Frederick Charles, Prince Charles, and, towering above the rest, Count Bismarck.

A grander battle-field could not be seen. The roar of the cannon was awful in its endless, ceaseless, deadly boom. The fighting of the French was desperate but unavailing; they were outnumbered. The Prussians came ever steadily marching onward, even up that terrible ravine, ever onward they came. The French stood and

died. The Prussians moved on and died too. They were mowed down as they advanced, but they advanced steadily all the same. For hours, nay, for ages, the ghastly advance continued; it left a black line behind it; that black line was the dead who were left at rest for evermore.

So the battle waxed and waned.

Then, late in the afternoon, when the foes were slackening fire, and when the strongest arm required rest, then another vast army came.

It was from the Crown Prince's host.

It was like some legend of mythical warfare. It was like the Homeric tales where the gods helped men and fought their battles for them. It came from some mysterious region, brought by some mysterious foreknowledge and power. It seemed a vast legion,—implacable, irresistible; victorious merely by its awful presence. It conquered as it came. Its coming was the final blow. The hearts of the French sank; the foe was hydra-headed; the fight was unequal, impossible.

Valentin was there. He was one of that conquering company; he was one of that victorious band. He advanced merrily, gaily, as a boy might, rejoicing in his strength, in his leader; glorying in the chance of battle. He advanced

burning with fierce passion as he joined the fight; his blood boiled as he rode proudly on. He thanked Fate for sending him there, and then—whizz!—what was this? was this death?—he felt a sharp, terrible pain at his side, he saw the sunlight overhead, mad cries of agony resounded in his ears, sobs of pain struck on his soul, and he knew no more.

But the day was won.

What mattered a hero more or less? The stars shone down on the white, upturned faces, and on the shrinking, agonized limbs. What mattered the wailing voices, the broken hearts? What mattered it that the flower of the Prussian nobility was spent that day? The battle was won.

CHAPTER VII.

> How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
> Make deeds ill done.—*King John*, Act iv. Sc. 2.
>
> Let men take heed of their company.
> *Second Part of Henry IV.*, Act v. Sc. 1.

Meanwhile these same six weeks that had been pregnant with such deep meaning, and with such startling events for Valentin and for the world, had worn away their weary length for Margaret at Froghambury Park.

Six weeks! say rather six centuries, six ages!

To live there in dull inaction, helpless, still, stagnant; to wait for news in miserable suspense, to get the news and still do nothing, to know the Fatherland was suffering, was in danger, to know help was needed, to know too that Valentin was in peril, and still to stand by and do nothing —it was terrible. Was that life? was that duty? was that what human submissiveness and wifely obedience meant?

Daily, hourly she pictured Valentin to herself,

in the smoke, amid the cannon and the shells, amidst the gleaming swords, and among the dying and the dead; daily, hourly she thought of her countrymen whom she had known, or of whom she had heard her father speak; daily she dreamed of the smiling pasture-lands, the peaceful valleys she had known, deluged with human blood, devastated by the cruel hand of war.

Was it wonderful that her spirit chafed within her, and that the calm of Froghambury Park seemed but a treacherous peace, and its pleasure but hollow mockery?

Dudley's want of interest made it worse. The news from the battle-fields scarce interfered with his breakfast, and that his pipe should draw easily was matter of far more moment to him than whether Germans or French were victorious.

He even laughed at Margaret for caring so much, and wondered that she cared not for croquet or for any of such things while any more news was still to be had. He said she was changing, that she was getting dull and stupid, that she only cared to have Fritz at her feet and a paper in her hand; and then suddenly it flashed upon him why it all was.

"You are thinking of that fellow!"

"What fellow?" asked she, contemptuously.

"Valentin."

She laughed; she knew it was not so.

"It is the whole war that is so dreadful, Dudley. Why cannot you see it too? Valentin is but one in the whole country's cause. Yet—you too must think of him?"

"Oh yes; of course I do. But a soldier must fight."

After that he was always talking of Valentin. Every day he asked if there were any tidings of him.

And she began—it was natural enough—again in her own mind to contrast the two. It was the old, old fatal line of thought once more. Here was Dudley, safe and likely to live for ever—and there was Valentin, clever, brilliant, accomplished, tender, perhaps already a mass of mutilated flesh. Valentin, with understanding quick to comprehend and enjoy everything, far away—suffering perhaps, uncared for certainly; and Dudley, dull, heavy, awake to no interests except continued discontent at home, and the fascinating company of the terriers and of Bill Ealing out of doors.

Fritz understood it. Fritz saw it all, or he seemed to; and made up by love for lack of

intelligence, which Dudley did not do. Fritz seemed to be the dearest possession Margaret had just then.

Those days were terrible.

Lorraine was away; Margaret had no friend, no sympathy. Froghambury began to seem to be a prison. Not that she was not free enough, for Dudley was seldom in need of her company, but the silence, the lack of life were sadly oppressive. It was impossible for her to banish the silence with music, it was impossible even to absorb herself in her painting, her heart was too full of Germany and its woes.

If she said she wanted company, Dudley proposed his mother or his sister. And then it was hardly company that she did want. She wanted sympathy or else work. Therefore her neighbours too were useless to her.

It was a miserable time of terrible suspense that almost drove her mad; and she would sit for hours silently thinking, with no companion at all but her faithful dog Fritz.

Dudley said he hated the great, useless fool. In truth Dudley Vane was getting strangely irritable. Amusements and sport he never had understood, nor, owing to his physical weakness,

had he ever been able to share in them with any amount of credit, but now daily he became more idle, more fidgetty, more unreasonable.

He disliked strangers. He even began to say the Chesters were unbearable.

Margaret wondered if it was the heat that made him so irritable. She learnt to answer him gently; but life's lesson was becoming a very difficult one to her.

The grandeur and beauty of Froghambury seemed to her in these days an insult; it all seemed a mockery of happiness; the old pictures seemed to laugh at her, the Cupids in the cornices blowing kisses from the ceilings all seemed to enjoy the joke, the stately old servants seemed to be spies, and the fancied enjoyment of possession seemed but to be part of the grand delusion.

For appearances she had sold her soul.

How bitter the conflict, how wearisome the daily, hourly contest.

Every way that she turned she thought she saw failure stamped on her work; everything that confronted her seemed to be saying "You will fail" before she touched it.

And she had thought she must succeed; she had thought progress was certain; she had

thought life must be so easy, if you only went straight on, and did what was right.

She had not counted on possible checks; she had not dreamed of all these difficulties. The real work was so different from the ideal life.

She had thought it would have been so easy to bring Dudley into her life, to make him love the things she did, and rouse his soul to ardour for the things that made life beautiful.

But no, he was out in the cold still; out, vanishing away into the dim distance farther every day; only her faithful dog seemed to have followed her inside the gate. Was the love of that dumb beast all she would ever really have to triumph in?

While these two beings were journeying away from each other, another charming personage had learnt to engross the ear of the heir of all the Vanes.

Bill Ealing, a red-faced, red-nosed, one-eyed individual of doubtful origin, and following the profession of a farmer, was playing the "Damon" to Dudley's "Pythias."

The friendship began with lengthy conversations over the merits of the terriers; it continued through many days of exciting and glorious rat-hunts; it deepened over the purchase of a horse,

in which transaction Dudley was the victim; it became eternal during evening talks in Bill's parlour over Bill's ale.

Margaret gave but little thought to it, for it was beyond her comprehension. She fancied that Dudley was always giving him orders; that Dudley could ever converse with him, or could ever feel the slightest pleasure in Bill's coarse flattery never entered within her philosophy.

And yet Bill Ealing was a man; a man in so far that he owned a man's cunning, and a mean personal pride, which made him resent as a personal insult the calm indifference with which Margaret treated him, or the cold stare of absolute ignorance with which she passed him in the road or in the village street. How little she knew of the volcano smouldering in that little heart; how far she was from realizing the vengeance vowed against her in that narrow mind. Bill Ealing loved money, he loved beer; but he loved also to be honoured by Dudley's companionship for the sake of the reflected glory it gave him in the eyes of those below or around him; it flattered his spirit to find that his company was agreeable to young Vane; he discovered that his wit must be sharp indeed, and his jokes of the choicest, since they gave Dudley such undisguised pleasure, and

that he laughed at them so heartily. But there was always the thorn that vexed him; handsome Lady Vane would not notice him. The manners that seemed so pleasing to her husband could not win a look or a smile from her. His heart seethed and bubbled within him as he thought over the studied insults she inflicted.

Dudley's civilities, even Dudley's money, thrown into his hand too trustfully and too carelessly for worthless animals on his false representations, even this did not compensate for the wrong Lady Vane did him. Was he not her husband's honoured friend and trusted companion? but yet what good did it do him when, in answer to his salutation in the village street, she took no notice at all, and Bill Ealing would turn to see the ill-repressed titter of the women standing by, or the pleased smile of the labourers, who hated him for his low wages, his tyrannous, grinding oppression, and his mean cupidity?

Was it not bitter? was it not humiliating?

Once even he had spoken to Dudley about it, asking him how he had offended "his lady," as he called Margaret; but Dudley had only laughed, he could not understand Bill's feelings, and he had made his anger worse by saying she probably did not see him.

"Not see him! not know of his existence! Was any mortal man to stand such pride?"

One day Margaret drove her pony carriage through Froghambury village with Fritz following her, when Bill Ealing was sitting drinking, as was his wont, at the window of "The Blue Boar" Inn. His ill-conditioned, pugnacious bull-terrier was sitting on the window-sill, enjoying the scenery of the village street, with his master.

Margaret was bound on a visit to a cottage opposite, and giving the reins to the groom, she got out of the carriage, leaving Fritz standing at the cottage door, looking up wistfully into her face as she signed to him to stay outside.

Fritz was used to go everywhere with her. He looked reproachful and hurt.

"No, my dear old fellow; your feet are too dirty. You must wait outside."

She stooped to pat him as she spoke.

Bill Ealing heard the words, for the window was open. He looked on, the very picture of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

Out ran a child,—colour, smiles, happiness, human love.

"Fitz! Fitz!" said the chubby angel, and straightway put its fat arms round the great dog's neck.

Fritz suffered the embrace with smiling dignity, and looked down on his admirer with gentle long-suffering.

"You dear old dog!" said Lady Vane; and she kissed him as she gently led the child away.

The door shut in his face, there was nothing left for Fritz but to make the best of it, and seek his own interests and amusement.

Wandering to and fro after the carriage up and down the village street, he soon found a bone, and sat down to enjoy it to his heart's content. His undisguised comfort was too glaring a contrast to Bill Ealing's frame of mind, and, scarcely thinking of what he did, he pointed out this Dives to his own plebeian Lazarus.

With one bound the dog sprang from the window and confronted Fritz—tail erect, eyes glaring. Poor peaceable Fritz arose. His bone was wanted; this vulgar specimen of a canine bully dared to enter the lists against him. Fritz despised him from his heart, but his honour must be kept stainless. Fritz must fight.

It was soon done. A little snarling, a deep growl, a roll in the dust, Fritz standing over his tormentor, a gesture of ineffable disdain, and the cur getting up, with a torn side and bleeding

throat, then running away, howling and discomfited, to his no less discomfited master.

Fritz finished his bone, cleared up the pieces, then looked about for his mistress; but neither carriage or mistress were to be seen, so, taking one more look down the street, he made up his mind she must have gone home, and he set off as quickly as he could to follow her.

Meanwhile what words will explain the varied feelings to which Bill Ealing now fell a victim! Inflamed by drink and by rage, mad at the treatment to which his dog had been subjected, though at his own instigation, he arose, feeling the world too small to contain him and his wrath. Mighty, though apparently conquered, burning for revenge, not only for this outrage, but for all Margaret's past insults, now magnified in his excited mind ten thousand times, he strode into the street, pointing at his bleeding dog, and struggling in vain for words.

Luck favoured him. Dudley Vane turned the corner, strolling lazily along, and looking for Bill Ealing or for any excitement that might present itself. His presence only added fuel to the flame.

Pathetically pointing to his injured cur, Bill poured forth a torrent of strong language, plenti-

fully seasoned with oaths, into Dudley's astonished ear.

A crowd gathered, and Dudley began to be frightened. Visions of the County Court, of a heavy fine, of all sorts of mysterious punishments began to float before his bewildered brain.

"The dog is dangerous, the dog is mad. My own dog is going mad, you see, from having been bitten. My dog will die; my poor harmless dog, that never hurt a living thing. I won't stand it, sir;——I tell you I won't!——do you think any man will—— What do you take me for, sir? A great mad brute like that! it will bite us all. It is not safe. Every one in the parish is afraid of it."

His blasphemy was frightful.

Dudley drew him into "The Blue Boar," and "stood" him a glass of spirits, while they thought it over.

Then he called for a glass for himself.

And all the while Bill went on, getting hotter and redder, and his eyes glaring more fiercely every moment.

"The great brute is mad; we are not safe a moment. I shall have you up, sir, if you don't kill him. You must kill him."

"Kill him!" murmured Dudley.

After all he was but a dog, just like a rat or a rabbit, or anything else, meant to be killed if it so pleased him.

"Kill him! you think he's mad?"

"Sure of it, sir," said Bill with alacrity, half sobered as he saw how quickly his words were taking effect.

"After all," thought Dudley, "that would be the easiest way out of the difficulty. It would never do to offend Bill. He was so useful to him. He really amused him, too, and here at Froghambury he was the only friend he had within easy reach. Moreover, the dog was a bore. Margaret was always talking to him, and he was for ever following her wherever she went. Besides, it was very hot; probably the dog was mad. He must be killed."

"Come along then," said he.

Bill achieved something more like a smile than he had done for years.

They emptied their glasses and walked up to Froghambury, Bill not forgetting to dwell on the injury that had been done him by the way.

It was hot and sultry. The sun blazed away pitilessly.

"Hold your row," said Dudley, as they reached the house, "or I shall go mad myself."

Fritz came out of his kennel as they passed through the yard, stretching himself, and he wagged his tail as he greeted his master.

"Don't touch him, whatever you do," cried Bill, loudly. "He's dangerous."

Dudley stood for half a moment looking from the dog to Bill Ealing. After all, he could not think the dog was mad. But he would like to do something vicious, cruel; he was bored. He was tired of the dog, and then Margaret was such a fool about him.

"You wait here," said he to Ealing.

The dog and the man stood looking at each other. The dog yawned.

Ealing was not interesting.

Fritz walked to the shade, stretched himself out, and went to sleep.

Presently Dudley came back. He had a gun in his hand.

"Fritz! Fritz!" said he.

Fritz started to his feet and bounded towards him.

Dudley put up his hand when the dog was about ten yards off and stopped him. Fritz looked at him wistfully. What did his master mean?

This: whizz through the air. Bang! It was Death that he meant.

The faithful eyes shone no more, the faithful limbs that had striven so often and so gallantly in his service quivered for awhile, till they stiffened themselves after the death agony, and then the noble, true heart was still.

Has not man dominion over every living thing on the earth? How nobly he uses the God-given privilege!

Vane and Ealing looked at each other. Then Dudley laughed brutally.

"I did not know I was such a good shot," said he.

"It was big game," said Ealing.

"Good-day," said Dudley, as he turned on his heel.

"Good-day, sir," said the other.

Ealing stopped a moment looking at the remains of the dog.

"It was a waste. But it serves her right."

CHAPTER VIII.

> And nought forbids my looking up at last
> For some stray comfort in his cautious brow.
> When lo! I learn that, spite of all, there lurks
> Some innate and inexplicable germ
> Of failure in my scheme.—*Paracelsus.*

It was late when Margaret came back from her visits to the cottages, and when she did so she came fully expecting to be welcomed by Fritz in the yard. When he was tired of waiting he often went home before her.

But there was no sign or sound that spoke of him; no glad bark of welcome, no rough manifestation of the usual burst of wild joy. The great kennel stood there empty, and the silence had something strange and unaccustomed about it.

There was a pool of blood in the middle of the yard. Margaret shuddered involuntarily, then turned half-smiling to the grooms who were standing at the stable-door, and asked—

"Where is my dog?"

Their faces, so strangely grave, suggested something was wrong; and her voice sounded unnecessarily sharp as she put the question.

That Fritz had fought another dog she knew, and that the other dog belonged to Bill Ealing, and that he had defeated him, that also she knew. Had not her groom told her the fact with glee, and had not she herself regretted that the vanquished dog should belong to such an obnoxious member of society as Mr. Ealing as much as the lad had rejoiced that the petty tyrant and hard master should have been made to suffer by such an irresponsible member of society as Fritz?

"Where is my dog?" asked she again, looking from one to the other of the silent grooms standing there, and letting her eye fall again on to the pool of blood by the carriage.

Then the coachman, who had been there since Sir Gilbert's boyhood, and who had grown grey in the service of these hot-tempered Vanes, came out to her.

"He is not here, my lady."

"Where is he?"

"Oh, he is put out of the way."

"Put out of the way? Shut up! Where?"

Her face expressed her indignation.

"He is killed," said the man, driven into a corner at last.

She looked from his face to the others, and read the confirmation of the news but too truly. Then the red pool caught her glance once more.

They were all looking at her face.

"Who did it?" asked she, at last.

"Sir Dudley."

"I understand," said she. But she did not.

She got out of the carriage slowly, and walked away towards the house, looking on the ground, with a certain languor in her steps as though she could not direct them.

In the hall she heard a man's step, and as she came in sight it stopped. Instinctively she knew it was her husband's, and that the sense of the wrong he had done her made him afraid of facing her. His cowardliness made her despise him more.

She was mad at the moment with pain and disappointment. She tried not to face him either. She stood for a moment irresolute, with her eyes to the ground. Then she stepped aside to let him pass. She felt that she could not see him. But he came nearer.

"Oh, so you have found it out, have you, old gal? Who told you?"

"I hate you with my whole soul," said she, in a low, concentrated voice. "Let me pass."

He stood looking after her. He had never seen her like that before. He had not known that Margaret could be, could feel, could look like that.

What had he done? He regretted it deeply enough now.

No; indeed he did not know what he had done; he had never really understood Margaret. Dudley had become her duty in life, and she had carried out that duty as far and as inviolably as it was possible for her conscientious nature to do. Nay, believing she should be grateful, she had taught herself to love him. But love taught is never the same as love involuntary. Dudley, however, had never discovered the difference. He was not penetrating. Now, perhaps, he would learn it. He had never understood what Margaret's life had been, how really solitary, and how she had existed without real congenial companionship, and how she had taught herself to live without sympathy and the energy which sympathy gives, for the sake of duty. For duty put Dudley, and the sacrifice is complete.

But Dudley had not understood it. Probably he never would understand it.

Margaret had married Dudley in obedience to her mother. In sacrificing herself, in marrying him, she thought she had wronged him. To make up for this wrong, to prevent him from discovering it, had been her one aim, to give him happiness had been her dearest hope. To teach herself to love him, to keep his love, had been her effort, her hope, her dream.

Now suddenly, on this September day, it was all dissipated, it was all over. His cruelty opened her eyes. He did not love her, and she hated him. Duty was an impossibility, all effort was vain. Truth is eternal. And to struggle against it is only to show the futility of human endeavour. We are but birds beating against the bars of our cage. All at once we strike ourselves harder than before, we fall exhausted, and struggle no more.

"It was no use," she thought; "she would give up. At all events there was one comfort in it—Dudley knew now that she hated him; there was no need now to consider appearances any more. What a margin and what breathing-room it gave her."

But for awhile she was really mad. Nobody understood it, or is the conflict of mingled

feelings to be at all easily explained. She was really mad. So disappointed, so hurt, so shocked by the sudden awakening to Dudley's real nature and to her own impotence over it, to her little influence over him and his happiness, so lost and so bewildered without Fritz that she really did not know what she did. All the rest of that day she shut herself up in her room, and no one was suffered to approach her. They heard her sobbing sometimes, and then would come a long silence, and then she would walk up and down; and the maid and the old housekeeper, waiting outside, began to cry too from sheer sympathy.

About the middle of the night she felt cold, and she lit the fire, then she sat herself down in front of it. But she could not really be still. Her brain was in a whirl. She could not be still. She would walk up and down, and then come back again and stare into the fire.

Suddenly she thought she heard Fritz bark in the yard, and she flew to the door and opened it. The maids scurried away, frightened at being discovered.

"Was not that Fritz's voice?"

They shook their heads. It had only been her imagination.

She turned away and shut the door again.

And the next day was just the same. She did not stir from her rooms, hardly from the fire. She sat crouched there. She might have been mad. They brought her tea and everything they could think of; and they told her she would be ill. But she only said—

"What matter?"

And then they said she would die.

But she only answered—

"What does it matter? It would have been better to die."

They could not understand. They only had seen a great big brown dog, with great true faithful eyes, who had loved her and had gone everywhere with her, and now he was dead. But he was but a dog; and they could not understand.

And then Dudley sent to know if she would see him.

She did not look up from the fire, and presently she said—

"No; I hate him so, I had better not."

He sent back to say he was going away; he thought that she was only angry, out of temper; he thought it would touch her.

"Yes," said she, catching at it. "And tell him to stay away. It will be better so."

And then he went. And the weary days went on. But she did not come down, or go out, or move away from the fire. She said that was the only place where she did not expect to see Fritz, and yet that even there she did see him sometimes.

So they told her she would go mad if she went on so; if she did not go out and see the flowers, and the sunlight, and the clouds, and the people, and the horses.

"You don't mean to say the sun shines, do you? It would not dare, would it?" and then she turned away sorrowfully. "Ah well! it does shine, I suppose. But all different; it cannot be, nothing can be the same."

As for the horses, the park, and the people, the very mention of them made her shudder. They were all so mixed up with Fritz, she could not bear the thought of them.

"I will never ride again, or go out again, or see anything alive again," said she. "There is no life, no beauty, no joy; Dudley has destroyed all."

In truth she was shipwrecked. She felt as if all hope, all aim had left her; as if all effort had henceforth left her, because all had proved useless. Fritz had been the one friend, the one expression of laughter and of innocent joy, of poetry, of

imagination; Fritz had been ready alike for a joke or for grave consideration, for calm endurance, for tender sympathy; Fritz had helped her in all her difficulties; Fritz had been the one idol she had allowed herself. Fritz was taken away, and in the taking all the hope of success in all her efforts, all the kernel of all her endeavours, seemed to have failed too.

Life was a riddle to which there was no answer.

Fritz had seemed a harmless sympathizer; she had thought that with him she was even triumphing. Now she saw it was all a mistake. There was no such thing as triumph for her at all.

Her thought of compassing Dudley's happiness and Dudley's love was all false. Everything was failure. It was hard that she should have learnt the lesson by the loss of Fritz, hard that that blow was needed to show that he hated her. But she learnt it well anyhow; it had that merit. Henceforward there would be no more mistakes. She would have liked to have had Fritz to comfort her just now, and to help her to bear the learning of the lesson. But it was not to be. She was to bear the ruin of her hopes and the shipwreck of her life all alone. It was almost the first trouble that she had borne without Fritz.

Sometimes she could not believe he was dead. She would start up in the night, fancying he was there; she would dream of him, or fancy she heard his voice; then it would all flash upon her, and she would burst into wild tears.

"I wish I or Dudley had died sooner."

One day—it might have been a week after—she was sitting as usual with her hands clasped before her, idle and hopeless before the fire, and the twilight was deepening in the room, when wheels suddenly sounded on the gravel outside.

She made a gesture of impatience, and half rose, with the intention of locking the door.

Dudley had come back evidently. She was to be disturbed then again so soon.

"Why could he not have stayed longer?" asked she aloud; "but he will not dare to come."

So she did not move. For the present she was safe.

A moment more and she heard a man's step up the stairs.

"It must be Dudley, and here he was coming in. How dare he do such a thing?"

She started up, suddenly roused, beautiful in her indignation.

The door opened, and on the threshold stood Valentin von Broderode.

So intense was the revulsion of feeling that for a moment she stood speechless.

Confused images of the war and all the horrors she had pictured to herself rose before her.

Her own little sorrow grew dim. She tried, with a sudden generous impulse, to throw it off, to get rid of it.

She went forward, almost gladly, though with a certain constraint in her manner, as though she had been guilty of some forgetfulness, of some selfishness, towards him.

"They told me you were up here, that you were alone in the house, and I thought I might come up."

"I am so glad," said she.

She had some one on her side then at last. Her old friend of days gone by had come back.

"Are you alone?" asked he, questioning her face.

"Yes; quite."

"Where is Dudley?"

"Away. I don't know where he is."

The question was awkward. It brought back to her the trouble that she was trying to put away.

"Won't you come to the fire?" she asked. "And you, Valentin, you are safe? Tell me

about the war, this dreadful war! How did you come? How did you get away?"

The distraction from the home-trouble that she could not tell, was a God-send. Public sorrows claim universal sympathy; private troubles often cannot be told, and must claim no pity. There was a certain constraint in her manner which he noted at once, and yet there was a difference. It was no longer the guarded stand-off manner which had excited his anger so bitterly, it was a growing trust, a piteous gladness, an unspoken entreaty for a sympathy which she had not claimed for years. He had come to her with his heart full of bitterness, of cruelty; full of revenge towards Dudley for having cheated him of her; full of anger towards Margaret for having been false to his love. Now he began to doubt once more whether he would use his instrument of vengeance; he began to consider, as he felt her standing beside him, whether he would not forgive the injuries that had been done him, and consign the will to the fire into which they were both staring, while so many conflicting thoughts coursed through their brains.

She too wondered at his abstraction as she listened to him talking. She knew him well enough to know his heart was not in his words,

and she wondered what was coming. She too was pre-occupied in thinking how she should tell him of her home-trouble, or how she could keep it away from him. But as she listened the difficulty faded; confidence grew.

He was telling her about the war, and the fighting; about the wounds he had received, and how after he had been in the hospital, and afterwards had been nursed at home by Lotta's help,—what memories the name awakened in Margaret's mind!—how he had applied for leave, and how the doctors had smiled significantly as they gave the required certificate, and how he knew they had hinted he might as well have what leave he wanted, for he would not be able to fight again. They thought him useless, and henceforth rather a burden to the Fatherland than any good.

"So I came," he added, simply.

Margaret's heart bounded towards him. This was constancy; this was friendship and truth. This was beautiful. Through all he had remembered her; and now, as soon as he could, he had come back. Then for the first time she saw he was haggard, ill, white, perhaps suffering. Why was his arm in a sling, and what was that scar on his face? Then too she saw he moved with difficulty. She felt alone no longer. Valentin too

suffered; Valentin had gone through pain. They must both be different; and they could both be friends. Once more her trouble faded. She seemed to rise above it, to lose self and selfish sorrow, and to be one of a suffering mass of humanity, but yet with the elements of helpfulness and of triumph within her.

"And you, Margaret?" he asked presently.

She questioned his face.

"Something is wrong," said he. "I saw it directly. What is it? Is it any trouble?"

"Nothing is wrong," said she. "I have no troubles."

There was a silence between them.

"You are not true," said he at last. "I was wrong to trust you. I might have known it."

"Shall I tell you then? It will sound so small, so insignificant after all you have seen and suffered. Shall I tell you?"

"You must."

Then he sat down, for he was weak, to listen. She stood, leaning on the mantelpiece, looking now into the fire, now into his face.

"It is nothing—nothing at least that any one else could think anything. It was Fritz; he killed him. My poor old Fritz; and I could not bear it. That is all."

She was crying.

Valentin looked on amazed. He remembered Fritz well enough; he too had loved the dog. But after all he had seen of death just lately—well, I only mean that it seemed strange that she should suffer so much. But then he had never understood Margaret's life at Froghambury, or did he know what Fritz had been in it. He had thought too that she was perfectly happy, so well had she worn the mask. He had thought she worshipped Dudley; it was for that faithlessness of hers that he had brought the will, that he might be revenged. Yet the wanton piece of cruelty roused him even now, and he wondered who could have played her this evil turn.

"Who killed Fritz?" asked he at last, wondering how he could but sympathize with her.

"He did. I hate him. Don't speak his name; I cannot bear it."

"Not Dudley? you don't mean him?"

A smile broke over his face as he put the question.

"Yes. Don't speak of him; I cannot bear it. I have told no one but you. I have seen no one. I do not know yet how to speak of it. No one can understand. It is such a blank, it is all so miserable. I am all alone now. Before, Fritz

was always there, and he understood everything."

"All alone now," he stammered.

"Yes," she went on, passionately; "I always have been alone. You did not know it. Dudley was nothing. He never could be anything. I thought at one time—but it was just a dream, that was all—I thought at one time I might make him something, or that I might be something to him, but it was never true, and this has shown me the falsehood of it."

"You have been living a falsehood; do you mean that?"

"Yes; I did not mean it. I thought I was doing a grand thing; I thought I was making a grand sacrifice,—it was for my mother, you know, when we were so poor, and Dudley gave her money,—and I thought somehow that if one gave up everything that one wanted, just because it was a giving up, it must be right. But some sacrifices even are all false, and if there is any deception in them they must fail."

"So—so——"

"Yes. Oh, the life was dreadful. I did not succeed. Every day I seemed farther away, and failure seemed ever present. The life seemed dreadful, so cold, so solitary. But hoping for

better things was very bad, and keeping up appearances was worse; that was the worst of all. Now that is all over." She straightened herself proudly. "There are no more appearances to keep up. There will be no more deception now. He knows I hate him."

"And Fritz?" asked Valentin, rather frightened, and wishing to be told more than he dared ask.

"Yes, that showed me what he was; how false and idle it had all been."

They stood quite silent there, looking at the smouldering ashes in the grate.

"Would you like to be revenged upon him?" asked he suddenly, starting up.

"I cannot," said she, shaking her head sadly. "He has nothing that he loves; nothing that he loves half so much as I do Fritz."

"He has Froghambury," murmured he in a low voice.

"And then Fritz never does any harm. He barks, and he looks bad because he is so big: but—ah!"—she caught the change in his face—"yes; I know what I am saying. He is dead, they say. Am I going mad, I wonder? But you do not know what Fritz is—was to me. He was all I had here. And he taught me everything.

He taught me how to live at Froghambury. He took me out, and he showed me beauty and fun and joyousness everywhere. But for him I should *not* have gone out, or should I have understood country life or Nature's messages and Nature's gladness at all. I thought I might always love him. Valentin, what shall I do now?"

He was standing beside her. Ill-repressed excitement almost mastered him. He was looking into her pleading, helpless, trusting eyes. Just so years ago he had looked into them, but with thoughts how widely different, with confidence how far from this. Then they had both trusted the future; now, alas! they had learnt to fear it.

"You are punished, Margot," said he, at last.

She was astonished. Did he see it so? Had she really ever caused him pain? had he ever felt anything, any disappointment in any human being as she had felt? had he too felt shipwreck? had he too felt alone? Unconsciously, in her impotent regret, she drew nearer to him.

"And now you hate him?" asked he.

She nodded her head slowly.

"And he hates me."

"Shall I help you to vengeance?"

She stared. What did he mean?

"You don't care about Froghambury, or for money, or for position do you?"

He stood looking down into her puzzled face.

"I hate Froghambury."

"Would you like to be poor, so long as you had sympathy and happiness and kindness instead——"

"Sympathy and happiness and kindness," stammered she, catching at the words.

"Nay, Margaret, I will tell you," said he, suddenly changing his tone. "You are quite poor; you have nothing. Froghambury is not yours. Nothing is yours. It is all wrong. Look at this."

He took the will—crumpled and creased, even blood-stained now—from his pocket, and put it into her hand. Then he studied her face. He expected her to cry, to be angry, to doubt it—he expected her to turn upon him. It was well to talk of sympathy and happiness, it was well to talk of hating Froghambury in the abstract, but a good rent-roll is a source of undeniable comfort, and one does not leave an assured home without a struggle.

"So—it is not ours?" said she at last.

There was a smile even on her face; the

necessity for action was a relief to her; it came as a diversion from her misery.

"It—may be yours still," said he slowly, watching her.

She did not understand his meaning.

"If—you—like, that is."

"How curious it was never found before. How did you get it? where——"

Then he told her how he had found it in the old cabinet; he told her too how he had kept it with him, always with him, how he had dreamed over it, how he had built castles in the air over it; and how,—suddenly coming nearer to her and speaking quickly,—how he had seemed to have new life on finding she was at last in his power.

"In your power!" she repeated.

She looked at him as she listened to his rapid utterance. He was burning with some vivid, masterful thought. It was not the Valentin whom she had known. This was some wild, fierce man who had been in scenes of mad passion, who had become used to and demoralized by horrible days of bloodshed and nights of human suffering and misery. This man standing by her, pouring out words of passionate violence, was one who had strayed far from the youthful promise, from the ideal she had known; this was one whose

soul had been poisoned by human brutality; this then was the work of war on a human soul.

"In your power!" she had said, with something of astonished contempt in her voice. "Valentin, you forget," she added, and in the tone there was pity.

"Forget what?" he asked.

"Forget yourself, and what you were, or what at least I thought you; forget too what I am."

"Forget what you are! never. False, miserably false, that is what you are. False to him and me alike. False to him in that you never loved him; false to me in that you did love me, and—but you could not be true; it is not in your nature. But see now if it could be so. Can you let me hear the truth once, can you so far be generous, and I will burn this paper. Not a word will I breathe of it. Then Froghambury is still yours; wealth is still yours, and more than that, the promises we made each other in brighter days might still have something of truth in them."

She started from him and stood like a hunted animal at bay.

"Not one friend—not you even?" she murmured. "And I trusted in you. But you know you must show that paper; you know you cannot hide it."

"No one knows of its existence. No one dreams of its having been in my possession. You have but to say the word, my darling; it all rests with you. Dudley's future, my happiness, all depends on one word; is it so difficult?"

The paper was in his hand again now. He held it over the flames.

"Valentin," she exclaimed, passionately, "can this be you who are talking to me thus? Is it you, my ideal, my idol if you will, who talk and tempt me thus? How has it come, my friend? how have you fallen thus? Trouble brought me very low; but you, you are a man. You should be stronger than I."

He put the paper in his pocket again. He stood looking at her angrily.

"So we are poor; we are nothing; we must work. What will"—she hesitated; she could not call him Dudley—"he do? He is so helpless."

"It rests with you," said Valentin.

"No; it does not rest with me," said she, quickly. "It is all coming right. I married him for money, and it is all taken away. I am punished. It is better so."

"What will you do?" He was laughing.

"Do!" She looked at him hopelessly. "After

all, I am alone. You are my enemy; that too was false a minute ago, that I had a friend. All human help is false I begin to think, except what I can give to others."

"You!" exclaimed he, contemptuously; "you! What can you give? You start aside to the first pleasant haven. To you there is no anchorage."

Just then the door of the adjoining chamber opened and shut again. But there was no footstep, nor did any one come. They forgot it.

"To you words are air, like the morning breeze, that comes over the hills and passes away to other ears, and to you promises are like the white clouds that fleck the morning sky of hope—something to deck an idle hour, and that is all."

"And to you?" asked she.

"To me they are life," said he, solemnly. "Do you think, when we talked together in the old false days at Sonnenthal, when we dreamed of heaven, and made a possible heaven here on earth; when we trusted life, and made our castles in the air of careers and triumphs, do you think it was not real for me? I believed in it all, and I lived on it all. You did not. The next words of love you heard you thought as good, and smiled as brightly and as falsely in another's face as you had done in mine."

"It was not false."

"What, Margot! did you care then in those old days? was it true, the smile I lived on then? You know I loved you; you know I love you now. You know what a hell you made of my heaven. Say, did you suffer too?"

"Valentin, it is useless, all this. It is too late now. You are mistaken. You think you cared, but you were so proud, so trustful, so confident, and, alas! so thoughtless too."

"Certainly, if you had told me, even you yourself, with your great truthful eyes, in those days that I should go and fight, and be wounded or killed, and you would care more for a poor dead dog, I should not have believed it then. Now—I see."

"It is not true, Valentin; it is not true."

"Look here, Margot. Be true to yourself, to us both, now, though so late. I—look, I know, —nay, I dare not say it. But, Margot, listen. I do not believe you, whatever you say. Take the veil away; tear away the thin disguise. Child, trust me, and be mine, as I am yours."

He was on his knees now; he knew not what he did. As for Margaret, she turned away, hiding her face in her hands.

"I remember it all," said he, following her.

"I see it all now. Your life, your sacrifice, your silent suffering, the brave way you have worn the mask before me; I see it all. Let us have done with it, Margaret."

His arm was round her now, his face was close to hers. With an effort she freed herself.

"You are mad, Valentin," said she, disgusted. "I believe I did love you once, years ago, just for ever so little time; but I see now how unworthy you were. You deserved nothing but what you got. I did quite right."

"You believe that? Do you know, if I am bad now, if I have fallen as you say now, do you know whose work it is?"

"It was all a dream that you could be good or great. You are not fit to be any one's ideal. It was all false—all your fine talk; your promises too meant nothing, and your love was selfish pride. Go, Valentin, go; do your worst. I have no friend once more. I will see you no more. I will live alone, and work alone."

Was he sobered? did he repent?

"At least you know I love you."

"Love me! Is that love? I call that hate rather. Do you, you, Valentin, who used to talk so finely, and so wisely too, do you call dishonour love? Are you a fool, then, as well as a knave?"

"At least forgive me, Queen Daisy."

She passed her hand over her eyes. The name sounded such a mockery. The old bright, girlish days seemed so far, so far off. She could not bear it. Was there nothing, not one straw of comfort, or of hope, or of sympathy left? Was this carefully-reared edifice of friendship also to fail her? Was this dream of mutual help and sympathy between herself and her husband and Valentin also—only a dream?

She could not help it; she burst into tears.

Standing there, looking on, Valentin came gradually to the waking sense of misery which an evil deed brings to a conscience not yet quite dulled to a sense of right.

"Will you forgive me, Queen Daisy?"

"Yes; oh yes; I suppose so. But don't call me that; you have no right now."

To her he seemed down in ever so deep a chaos of despair.

"There is nothing left in life now," said he.

The shades deepened in the room, and she sobbed on uninterruptedly.

"I had better go away," said he, getting up at last. "At least I had better go down."

"How terribly you have failed," said she,

taking her hands away from her face and meeting his eyes.

He went away, shutting the door after him. As it closed upon him the other door that led into Margaret's room was gently pushed open, and Dudley Vane stood before her.

"I heard all," said he.

"I am glad of it."

But he had not heard half.

"We are quits now," said he.

"Yes; we are quits," said she.

She was thinking of the will, and she pitied him in her heart.

CHAPTER IX.

Of him, myself, and thee, I am forsaken ;
A torment twice threefold to be thus cross'd.—*Sonnets.*

As for Dudley, he was beside himself with rage. Whether he had acted honourably by listening to the conversation between Valentin and his wife or not he never stopped to think, but he jumped at once to the worst of conclusions, and felt himself an injured, betrayed man. He gave her no loop-hole for escape. In his eyes she was false and guilty. That she had uttered some grand, unintelligible words he knew vaguely, but his own sharp sense told him they were but a thin disguise for her guilty passion. She had, perhaps, heard him come into her room, she must have heard his footstep ; he had entered hastily, carelessly. He had come, anxious to see if she had got over her bad temper about the dog ; there had been no thought of concealment in his mind. She had probably heard him, and she

had attempted to mislead him by her words. But he had heard enough. He knew all now. Not only did she hate him irreparably for having killed Fritz, but she always had hated him; she had married him for his money, and she loved Valentin. There it was in a nutshell, so simple, so complete, a life plot and a life tragedy. What a fool he had been. He was angry with himself, and with her, and with all the world beside. As for Valentin, he felt mad when he thought of him.

Valentin loved her, and he had dared tell her so. She too, so Valentin had said, had always loved him. Dudley believed it implicitly. That was the worst of it. The long weeks and months all came back to his mind; the sad procession seemed to choke him as he watched; her solitude, her self-restraint, her efforts after better things, her thoughtless contrast of himself against Valentin, her pleasure in music and painting, her sympathy with Valentin in the old days at Sonnenthal, her refusal of himself in London, the first days at Froghambury; later, her wild excitement about the war; now her hatred of himself, which had burst out so uncontrollably when he killed her dog; her sending for Valentin, his finding them together there, and she acknow-

ledging he had been her ideal; his passionate words, her wild sobs. Ah! could he kill him, and so end it? Could he kill him? Where was he?

Stung to madness by these jealous thoughts he went in search of Von Broderode. Not in the hall, not in the drawing-rooms, not in the gallery.

"The coward has fled," said he, aloud, as he came into his own room at last.

No; there by the window, sitting with his face buried in his hands, and a paper spread on the table before him, sat Valentin.

"At last I find you, coward," said Dudley.

Von Broderode started up. Was Vane mad? What did he know? Why did he speak thus? While he had been alone there he had been thinking whether he would not after all destroy the will, and leave the woman he loved just so much happiness; of course she would never forgive him this day's work; but if he were to do just this it might be some slight reparation. Whether it would be honourable—well! but he loved her, and her interests were his; and then, perhaps, if she saw him burn it before her eyes, and if she just shared the secret with him, was there not sweetness in the thought? Then, he

wondered, surely she could not love this cruel, intemperate, coarse-minded Vane; surely the old dream might one day——

"At last I find you, coward."

Valentin started up. A wearied expression of being tormented crossed his face. Here were new complications.

"Coward!" he repeated, haughtily.

"Yes; I repeat it. Double-dyed coward. I have heard all. I know all."

It flashed upon Valentin that Margaret had told him about the will.

"I have been a fool," said he.

They stood looking at each other, these former friends. A woman's step made them turn. Margaret, fearing mischief, had come down. Hatred was written on both their faces. Valentin looked like the shadow of his former self; Dudley, with his pale face, looked more ill, more wretched, more the victim of drink and dissipation than ever before. These five or six days' recklessness had made their mark.

Dudley stamped his foot at the sight of her, and motioned her away.

"I will not go," said she, with calm determination.

"You have no place here any more," said he,

wildly. "But if you will, stay; you like the sight perhaps."

He crossed the room and took up a pistol-case. Then he went to Valentin, offering it.

"Here," said he. "I heard—I know all. You are a beast and a coward. You must fight."

"Why?" asked Valentin, a certain sense of humour breaking upon him as he took the pistol.

"You will not fight!" said Margaret, looking at him for the first time.

"Your husband is mad, and I must humour him."

"I am not mad; but I am going to shoot you."

"Dudley shoots dogs, nothing higher," said Margaret.

"He wants this paper," said Valentin, laying down his pistol; "that is why."

Dudley looked from one to the other. Then he raised his pistol and—but Margaret stepped between.

"Shoot me, if you like," said she. "You and he have something else to settle first."

Vane swore aloud as he dropped his pistol.

What! then she cared for him still? She risked herself before that madman thus.

Surely, such was his mad thought, she would

let her wifely duties go to the winds now; surely, though so late, she would accept his love. He knew she loved him from that gesture of hers.

"He is mad," said Valentin. "Choose between us, Margaret."

He held the will up that she might see it.

"Say but the word, and I destroy this. Choose between us even now and trust me."

"Give me your pistol," said she, smiling suddenly, and holding out her hand towards him.

He obeyed her and gave it.

"I have chosen," said she, walking back to her husband, and putting her hand lightly on his arm.

He shook it off as though it had been a viper.

"I have chosen," said she, again looking out clearly on Valentin. "He is my husband; and he is mad. You cannot fight. As for you, did not I say I forgive you? but I will never see you any more, or speak to you again."

Then she turned away from the room slowly, taking the pistol with her.

"So you won't fight?" said Dudley, bullying him.

"No, I won't."

"I thought you wouldn't dare."

"Look here, Vane, fighting is no great matter to me now-a-days, nor is my life worth much even to myself. You might have it for the asking. But you are her husband, and she chooses to hold to you still. Psha! what am I saying? Here is a paper you must see. I am sorry for you, and sorry that I should have been the one to—— No, I am not; no lies. I am sorry for your wife, that is all."

Vane took the paper, and he staggered as he read. To this man money was very dear. Froghambury, its broad acres and grand old house, the good rent-roll it brought him, and the position it gave, all had become his second life; he could not fancy himself or his existence going on without Froghambury.

"This is not true, not authentic. *You* have made this up."

"It was in the old cabinet you gave me. You know it had stood in Sir Gilbert's room. I suppose he put it there at the last."

"If he marry Margaret Hoffman," repeated Dudley to himself.

Meanwhile Valentin sat down at the table and simply copied the few words of the will.

"That is for you," said he, looking into Vane's

white face as he gave him the copy, and despising him in his heart. "I keep the will. I am not sure that I should have produced it; I am not sure that I should not have burned it; but she has made me tell it. Here," he added, putting a card in his hand, "is my address in London; we must meet again."

"I suppose so; in this world or the next."

"I am going back to the war; but not immediately. I shall be in London."

Dudley's eyes were still bent on the copy of the will.

"Fight!" he murmured; "he won't fight unless he has some one behind him to make him go on."

But Valentin had gone.

As he crossed the hall he heard the rustle of a dress, and looking up he saw Margaret slowly turning to go up-stairs. Just in that instant he caught sight of her face—cold, wretched, white, miserable.

"Have I done that?" thought he to himself, and his heart seemed to stand still as he hoped wildly she might turn and see him.

She did turn; their eyes did meet. What a wild look of sorrow and reproach and pain it was. There was no sound, no speech between them; only that sense of eternal reproach.

He started off as if he had been shot. Nay, a moment more, and was he not shot?

There was the report of a pistol, there was Vane at the window, there was the bullet whizzing by Valentin's ear, and there he was —walking alone; safe, but for henceforth for ever alone.

Had she seen? had she known?

He did not know. Only this he knew, that from henceforth he must be for ever alone.

Yes; Margaret had seen, she had heard. She turned slowly on the stairs and went down again.

Dudley was there, white, shaking in every limb.

The copy of the will was open on the table.

"God forgive you," said she, solemnly.

He turned sharply.

"You there? you are always there; get away."

"You tried to murder him. It was not your fault that you missed."

"Get away. You lie."

"You could not kill a man, only a poor harmless dog."

"That coward would not fight."

"You! no, I should think not."

The contempt in her voice stung him to the quick.

She turned to go away.

"I have something to show you," said he, brutally; "something very pleasant. Wait a minute."

He scrutinized her face.

Did she know of this will? He had not heard it mentioned in that conversation between them. If only,—and a wild, feverish hope sprang up in his heart,—if his suspicion had been too easily excited, if there were not that perfect confidence existing between Valentin and his wife that he had supposed, if he had not told her, then he might after all be wrong; she might after all be noble and pure and single-hearted towards him, as he had had faint glimpses sometimes that a good woman might be. If—here was the test—if she did not know, then some time they might still be friends; if, on the contrary, Valentin had told her, and both were watching for his ruin, and he had in fact stopped her desertion of him just on the threshold of poverty, then it must be all too late and there would be no hope for either of them more.

"You thought you married me for my money," said he, in his true bullying tone; "but

you will be disappointed. Prepare for a surprise."

She stood calmly waiting.

He never thought she would tell him; he thought to himself he would judge by her face. He pushed the copy of the will into her hands.

"Are you not surprised?"

She looked at it, but without reading it. She knew all about it, but she was wondering why that one had been in a cramped, neat handwriting, and why *this* was in Valentin's writing.

"Where did you get this from?"

And then she saw by his sudden change of manner how much depended on her pre-knowledge; she saw that he actually hoped from it, that if she could only say that she knew nothing, that she was ignorant of this disaster, that she had in fact been powerless in it—that to some great, incomprehensible extent her innocence was established, and that happiness in some small degree might be possible.

"Don't you know? Didn't he tell you?"

For a moment she lifted her eyes to his face; they met his fearlessly.

"Yes; he told me all about it."

His hands fell down at his side, a frown settled on his face, he avoided her glance; at

last, mechanically, he put out his hand for the paper.

"I did try to shoot him."

"God forgive you. Just for the sake of a little money. God help you."

"We must act upon this at once, I suppose," said he at length.

"Yes," said she, with more energy in her voice than it had had for days, "at once; this minute. Douglas will know; let us ring and ask him, since it has his signature."

She moved towards the bell.

"Are you not sorry? do you not mind?"

He shrank from letting even the old butler know that he was a poor man.

"Yes," said she, turning, with her hand on the bell; "for you I am sorry. For myself, I do not care."

"That is a lie," said he. "Don't let us have more of them, at least."

"I only meant that I do not see what you are to do," said she, moving off, and ringing at once with decision, while her heart turned to stone, and all the pity towards him died out at once. "For myself, I do not care."

"You will go off to the man who won't fight, I suppose, now that I am poor."

"Perhaps I may," said she.

CHAPTER X.

Qui a cessé de jouir de la superiorité de son ami a cessé de l'aimer.—*Madame Swetchine.*

When trouble comes very heavily upon one, and there seems no outlook from the black clouds but suffering and shipwreck and sorrow; when the night is so dark that one can scarce see one's hand before one, then, amid the consolations with which a human soul is provided, one of the healthiest and the safest is, perhaps, good, honest, hard work. If that work can tend to the happiness or comfort of others so much the better, so much the nobler, so much the fuller is our own comfort, and so much the more are we perfected in our suffering; but, if that cannot be, yet let some healthy work be done and peace is slowly shed upon us.

To Margaret, who after much conflict and self-abasement had learnt to forgive Dudley her sorrow in her very pity for him in his misfortune,

this chance of work gave life and hope and new energy. Dudley's happiness could not yet be thought of; he would not suffer her to approach him; he would barely speak. Sympathy with him was impossible. But she might consider his comfort from the distance, afar off as it were, and to that in a thousand little nameless ways she devoted herself. He did not believe in her, she knew; he hated accepting any service from her; if he had any comfort in his poverty, it was that she was thereby poor too; but she seemed not to notice his cruelty and mistrust, and went on her way hugging her sackcloth and ashes to her poor empty heart, and heaping coals of fire on his head.

Yet she was very miserable. Poverty was nothing, but their lives were wrecked. And was it not through her? Was it not all her fault? That was the question that tormented her.

She should not have married him if she could not be happy with him. Then she should have kept no one comfort for herself in which he had no share, she should not have left his life out in the cold. True! he would not, could not share hers, but still—no; it had been wrong, and she had not seen how to put it right. She had thought she loved him, and instead of that she

had loved Fritz. Now she should not have made of Fritz what she did. Was she not stern to her poor little self? Was it not pathetic? And then she should never have hated him, madly, violently as she had; surely now she repented in dust and ashes; but still had not the battle been hard? She to have brought all this trouble upon him, and now because, too, he had married her he must lose his home, his house, his money! All through her! The very pity of it made her repent of her own sorrow and anger and hatred, and in her pity she almost felt she could love him now, though so late, if she might.

But she might not. He was miles off now. And there were miles and miles of sorrow and of self-control and of suffering to be traversed before they could meet as friends again. Why had failure come to them thus? Why was the reality of life so different from the idea of it? Why had the possible future looked so fair, and why now was there nothing but blank despair staring her in the face? If only she could begin again, if only she might have the blank unwritten page before her once more, if only the ideal might be attainable once more.

Yet surely it was! (Thus she would talk to

herself in those dull, dark days.) No good once seen is lost or is vanished for ever. Once present with us, we may strive after it, though late, and in the end gain our hold on it once more. Slowly on her struggling sense came the thirst for moral beauty, came the wish for living close to duty, and for having her life so firmly held, so purely clothed by it that the possibility of straying from it might be lost. In such a circle of work happiness seemed again real and lasting. If only she might grope near to it by degrees so. Would she be let to do that?

She had never seen the beauty of life or the misery of thoughtless sin so clearly before.

Would she be strong enough to follow the path all by herself — all alone? It was sombre, sometimes it looked hopeless. And at such times her heart was very heavy.

Her husband's nature, his want of affection for her, his cruel, vindictive temper revealed before her; Fritz wantonly killed, and her friend—the friend of her girlish days, the man whom her soul had delighted to honour, the man whom she had loved and about whom she had woven such dreams of friendship for herself and her husband; the man whose life she would have guarded from all stain and sorrow—now far from her, necessarily

sent away, living his stained life where he might, and she prevented from all further interest therein.

Sometimes she could not realize it.

Could a human soul, she would ask herself, fall away thus from its own standard and from its own knowledge of right? It was not as if Valentin had been ignorant, or even weak, as so many are; he knew better, and such had been his knowledge, it had, or should have given him strength. It was not as if he had not known her or her character. How could he have entertained his thought for a moment? Had not he always despised sin as weakness? had not he often laughed when he had heard of others yielding to temptation? Had not, in fact, his soul been captivated by beauty—the beauty, that is, that has no falsehood in it, and that is as fair within and throughout as any passing semblance may seem? Just for that loyalty of his to truth and goodness, just for his dreams of ambition, just for his confidence in his strength, and for his faith in his success—had he not won her love? And now how was the trust shattered; now how had the proud life come to shipwreck! Where was the early promise that the bright morning had offered to them both?

To her now no rising for him seemed possible. He had failed miserably, hopelessly. His life-star had sunk; there could be no more beauty or brilliancy about it. What visions had she had of the three—Dudley, Valentin, and herself—all walking placidly on the road of life, turning aside to help each other, blessing each other's lives with the mutual help of sympathy, and using their several strengths for each other's benefit; making, as it were, a great, sudden light of sunshine for all who should cross their way, and helping others by the way-side, as they were themselves helped.

As it was now, alas! they all three needed help. Which would rise first?

And of the three, the highest, the bravest, the strongest, the one in whom the elements of helpfulness had seemed the best, the Valentin in whom she had trusted, had fallen the lowest. The hardest part of it was that she could not help him; that she must not even try. He must stay out there ever so far away, and she must know nothing, must ask nothing.

They were severed for ever. Fallen and lost and miserable and alone. Once he had called her his guardian angel. What a sarcasm!

Through her he had failed thus miserably.

Through her he had lost the bright vision of truth. Through her these two men, of whom she had first dreamed such beautiful dreams of eternal help-giving friendship, had both stained their lives, and now she was helpless to remove the blot she had made.

And in her helplessness she would grow angry. To think she had ever had any ideal, she would say; but she had had it. And then he had seemed so worthy, so bright, so strong, like a very angel of light, dealing only in smiles and confidence and mercy, trusting in goodness and in the strength such trust gives,—but now fallen.

What was the good of knowledge, of cleverness —what was the good of knowing better things, and of having once loved them—if, all at once, so soon, so suddenly the false step can be taken? There was nothing human worth caring for or worthy of belief any more.

There was only one thing. Effort. To that she would devote herself. She would hope nothing, she would fear nothing, she would only strive. Hitherto she had not striven enough. Alone and friendless and weak and miserable, but yet faithful to the light she had seen but well-nigh lost, she would strive yet, and see where the struggle would land her at last.

Life must be lived. One may be wrecked, but if death has not come one must breathe till he does come. And it is well to do it as comfortably, as truthfully to one's wants as one can. One must be faithful to oneself at least. The wants of our comrades do not enter into every one's articles of faith, but to the best of us they do, and when they do they must be obeyed, or we only breathe half our life.

Dudley was left to her still; afar off, out in the dim distance, cold, impassive, but still there. In time she might creep near to him and share his life still, and bring it near to hers again.

For that other all kindness, all hope, all sympathy was impossible. The thought of him was an eternal reproach; it was blank misery, it was endless despair. For ever severed; for ever alone; for ever each living a life scarred, spoiled; both maimed for eternity.

All through those miserable days Margaret seemed to be moving as if in a dream. There was the will, and its evident uncontrovertible authenticity; there was old Douglas' asseverations; he remembered it all, and by degrees he understood it all, and explained it all as it slowly dawned on his understanding. Then there were lawyers' letters and lawyers' meetings; there was Mr.

Tudor hovering about, now condoling, now explaining, now telling them to hope, now telling them there was no hope for them at all; there were consolatory letters from friends, there were irritating letters from the mothers-in-law, there were mysterious communications from the distant relation who was becoming the owner of Froghambury; there were vague surmises about "what they should do now," where they should live, and how they should live there; and above and beyond all, there was the pale, unhappy face of Dudley, who began to look as if his next place of residence would not require much thought in this world.

In vain Margaret bore all uncomplainingly, even cheerfully, in vain she showed how little the loss of money and of Froghambury troubled her, in vain she faced the future bravely and confidently; Dudley was inconsolable. Certainly there was much to bear.

At last the adieux of friends, the questions of relations, the uncertainty of the future were comparatively over; Froghambury was abandoned, and Dudley and Margaret found themselves in a small home in London.

To Dudley this was misery. To Margaret it was life.

That first evening her dear mother came to see

her, and after some common-place condolences fell carelessly into vituperation. It was all Margaret's fault, she was sure. In the first place, she should never have married Dudley; he was a poor miserable creature, and if only Margaret had not jumped to conclusions about his being rich, she, Mrs. Hoffman, would never have been talked over by her daughter.

Valentin was worth a hundred of him. Had not she heard how bravely he had fought in the war? There was a brave, good young man, if she liked.

And then how silly Margaret had been. She had not managed him well. Rumour had not been idle, and of course every one knew that he had been in love with her, and if she had only been ordinarily clever she should have got that will from him. Of course it had been folly to give away the cabinet; they deserved much for having made such an expensive gift; but still, having made it, Margaret should have made him burn that will. What else was the use of his being in love with her?

"And, Margaret," she added, at last rising to put on her bonnet, "was it true that he would not fight? Eh? I dare say it was all talk; but it looked bad for you. Perhaps there was no duel, or no talk of it. Was there?"

"There was no duel; duels are things of the past. And a duel indeed! What stories people do invent. No. Mother, I am so tired, I must go to bed. We had such a journey to-day."

"Oh, so there was no duel. But then I suppose it was because he would not fight. Dudley said he wouldn't; and I didn't know what to say. It has been an awkward business, but you must just live it down. People often do have to live things down; but it is a long business, and a bore. And I'm sure you might have managed better."

Poverty might be very well to laugh at when it was yet a long way off, it might even be pleasant to dream about, and it is a fine subject in plays or novels for romantic situations. But when it began to come home to the Vanes daily, almost hourly, as in their London life it necessarily did, the romance of it began to ooze away very uncomfortably.

The one fact that stared Margaret in the face was that she had brought Dudley to this. Certainly it had been done in all ignorance, but still the fact was there. How to repair it was the enigma of her life just then. The bare mention of her working, of her doing anything to gain money, was treated by everybody with ridicule.

Yet Dudley could do nothing. He did not know how to do anything, and he seemed to get more ill and more unhinged and more hopeless every day. Margaret wondered if he was really going to be ill.

Somebody must do something. She must. So she went to see her old friends, her authors and her actors and her artists, and amid glad laughter at seeing them again and tears at her sad circumstances she asked them to help her. What a helpless flood of sympathy she got.

And then Lorraine came to see her, pretty Lorraine, who cried as she held her hand, and who wanted her and Dudley to come and live at Carlingsford till they saw their way better; and then Lord Chester came and said the same thing, till Margaret fairly broke down, and said she could not be happy like that.

They smiled admiringly, but looked very much puzzled, and went away; and then they came again and said it again.

But then Margaret got up, and half crying, she took Lorraine's hand, and then she laughed a little, and looked up shyly at Lord Chester's face.

"I have something to tell you," said she.

"What?" said he.

"But it is very shocking," said she.

And then she laughed again.

"Margaret is certainly mad," said Lorraine.

"Yes, I am mad. But it is all settled now."

"What? That you are mad?"

"It has been very tiresome. I had no idea it would be so difficult. But it is all settled at last. Orford Ellis came, and Bertram Powys has been so kind, and I had to go, oh, once, twice, and twice more, and read there at the theatre before a whole lot of horrid people and fusty men, and then there was talking, and arguing, and bothering, and bargaining, and days with no news at all, and then more reading, more frightful ordeals, horrid visits here from all sorts of extraordinary people, but now—(I believe they told all sorts of stories about me, and made me out much better than I am) now it is all settled. Congratulate me; I am going on the stage."

Lord Chester coloured and started.

Lady Lorraine laughed aloud.

"I half envy you. How happy you will be."

"Lorraine!" said Lord Chester, sternly.

"Well, I do. In our miserable society life we can do nothing. We do nothing by wholes at least; we are hindered and stopped everywhere. And we do nothing worth doing, except little bits of kindness, just crumbs of bread perhaps, which

could not sustain life unless we were very easily satisfied—which we are; we almost do live on material comforts; our souls struggle on as best they may. You now will live truly."

"Won't you give me a little bit of applause some day, Lord Chester?"

"Of course I will," said he.

But he was troubled. He did not see why she should be so happy.

CHAPTER XI.

Much might be said in tributary praise,
Could just encomiums dwell in poet's lays;
But no, a higher laurel far she wears,
And gains the great reward of tributary tears.
Lines written to Mme. Céleste.

Not only was Lord Chester's mind disturbed by the news Lady Vane had given him of the plunge she intended to take, but the minds of her husband, her mother, her mother-in-law, her friends, her country neighbours, and the circle, widening as the rumour spread, of the London world itself, or that small section of it called the world, all participated in the disturbance.

What puttings-up of hands there were, what shakings of heads, what displays of pocket-handkerchiefs and rollings of eyes. How many "I thought so's," and "I told you so's," or "I guessed it would end strangely," and "These ill-assorted marriages never do," or "We knew there was something odd about her." Yet it was

almost a triumph for Mrs. Vane. Her step was more elastic, her eye shone brighter, for had not she been proved a true prophetess? Had she not always said Margaret was unlike other people?

And for Mrs. Hoffman it was almost a defeat. (I am speaking as the world saw it, in a worldly, social way, not counting the poverty or the straits the Vanes were put to, and not counting either the pride of either husband or wife; especially not counting the dumb, silent, haughty spirit of the one to the other. Both could suffer, but neither could complain. Only Margaret looked before her and tried to rise above the suffering.)

But to Mrs. Hoffman this plan of Margaret's to work for her daily bread was a social defeat. Had she not married her daughter to Dudley Vane for position, for connection? had not her dream been to see her daughter a great lady, giving entertainments, being universally liked and respected? indeed had there not been a vague dream that in time her daughter, Lady Vane, should lead society? With Margaret's talent and beauty, with Dudley's former wealth, there had seemed nothing preposterous or absurd in this. Society is so easily led! And dreaming

of this leadership, depending on this social status, Mrs. Hoffman had already looked up many of her old connections, had renewed many of her old acquaintances; leaning as it were on her daughter's arm, she had formed anew many broken ties; but now, what was she? where was she? Margaret was absolutely flying in the face of the life she had made for her, and was marring the destiny that Providence and her mother had offered to her. What society now—even the weakest—would ever be led by a young woman on the stage; one who associated with the oddest of people, and who worked for her daily bread? There was the sin—the stain for which nothing could atone.

"Work! oh, Margaret, how *can* you?" said she one morning after one of her daily tirades against Margaret's avocations.

"But, mother, we are so poor."

"Mrs. Vane would help you."

"No, indeed; she says we are to help ourselves."

"That is because you can help yourselves."

"Perhaps."

"Do nothing; she will help you better."

"I could not bear that."

"Dudley should do something."

"What could he do?"

"Does he like this madness of yours?"

"I do not know; he says he does not mind what I do."

In fact he did not seem to mind. He used to sit there for hours watching Margaret studying her part, till his company became torture; he seemed to have no spirit for anything. He watched her, watched her narrowly, and that was all; and if he was discovered in his watching he averted his eyes, and generally closed them.

Just the hope of success kept Margaret alive, for all through this dreary time of work and solitary effort she felt that Dudley did not trust her. Valentin had gone back to the war, the country had thrilled with the news of Sedan and Metz, and of defeat after defeat of the French arms, of victory after victory for the Prussians, but Margaret purposely avoided the papers; she would not annoy Dudley by showing any interest. And as far as individual interest went she was playing no part. Her heart seemed turned to stone towards Valentin. Her sole aim in life seemed atonement to Dudley by every thought and kindly evidence of care that she could, and by her work and self-denial, for the wrong she had done him in marrying him.

This was the hardest time of all. She had every one against her.

Dudley said or suspected that she liked the stage for the freedom it gave her, and for the opportunities she would have to see Valentin frequently; the neighbours said it was her real nature coming out which had been repressed too long at Froghambury; the world waited, laughing, for the fiasco it would witness; and Mrs. Hoffman and Mrs. Vane, meeting one day accidentally in Margaret's little drawing-room, shook hands over their antipathy and flatly said they disowned her.

No one for her but Orford Ellis and Bertram Powys and such friends, and these the world said were mad.

The manager of the theatre, however, was for her, and no one said he was mad.

He had had the fact of her appearance posted up everywhere; often the words caught Margaret's eyes as she walked through the streets.

But no one counted the cost to her. Not the fear of failure, or the acute terror of ridicule, or the abject feeling of despair and of humiliation in Dudley's eyes if all went not well. No; none counted the cost, save one little friend.

Lorraine used to come and hold her hand and look into her eyes and ask how she was getting on.

"Oh, well; better. I have more courage now."

"And are you happy?"

"Almost. No; I shall be when it is over."

"And is Dudley kinder?"

"No; he is never kind now."

"Does he mind this plan of yours?"

"No; he doesn't mind what I do."

"That is dreadful."

"Yes; it is dreadful."

Then Lord Chester came and advised her to give it up. "Every one was talking so."

"Why won't people leave one alone!" said she. "If they only would it would be so much easier to go straight on and do right."

"But do give it up."

"You don't know how much money they have offered me."

"But you don't care for money."

"But Dudley must live. He wants all sorts of things."

"Let him work."

"He cannot. He is too ill now. He seems to have no strength for anything. Oh, Lord Chester," said she, suddenly breaking down, "do

you think distrust, suspicion could ever make a man so unhappy that he might fall ill?"

"Suspicion, eh? I don't know. Eh! what do you mean?"

"Do you think it might kill a woman? It is so hard, distrust—I mean so hard to bear; I think it might. But what am I saying? Don't tell Lorraine what I said."

"And you really must go on the stage?"

"Yes. I could not run away now, you know. And I must."

"Of course, if a woman says she must, she must."

And so at last, after weary days of working, after solitary hours of self-restraint, after a dreary Christmas that was not like Christmas at all to Margaret or to Dudley, one night at the end of January the curtain went up in a London theatre, and Lady Vane stood before the public.

Had they not all disowned her? had not mother and husband and mother-in-law and friends and neighbours and even society itself frowned upon her? was there one friendly face looking at hers? was there one kind smile to meet her nervous, anxious, hurried look? were the manager's prophecies of a full house at all likely to be verified?

Yes; they were all there. For torture, for friendship, for sympathy, for love, for applause, for amusement, whatever the motive, they were all there.

Margaret felt her heart bursting within her as face after face peered into hers out of the gloom beyond the footlights; she felt her spirit lightened within her, and she knew she must succeed.

There in the front row, cold, pale, impassible, sat Dudley. The audience laughed satirically, when again and again she turned to him as she played, determined to win him more than all the rest in the hour of her triumph.

And there, close by, sat Lorraine. Ah, she had done it all. It was she who had brought this bevy of friends and this galaxy of bright eyes to look at Margaret play. She it was who had asked, commanded, threatened; she it was who had talked, entreated, slaved for Margaret.

And there too was Mrs. Hoffman in a box far away. Though "disowned, she could see Margaret she supposed," so she said, "as well as any one else."

And there were Mrs. Vane and Lilly.

"They came," they said, "to see Dudley's wife disgrace herself."

And there, kinder than the rest, kinder even

than the society people who cared not which way it was, so long as they were amused, kinder than all, were Orford Ellis and Bertram Powys with his sister and other friends, who had no other help to give but love and kindliest sympathy. These they gave; and Lorraine and Margaret blessed them as she took and appreciated the gift.

How was it then? Was it failure? Ah, no; she triumphed.

The dazzling footlights, the beaming faces swam before her as the thunders of applause rang in her ears, the bouquets fell at her feet, and the house rang again with her honoured name—honoured surely and rightly so. If ever woman had laboured unaided without hope in all despair self-abnegatingly, she had; she deserved every atom of honour she won. Tears filled her eyes as she listened.

"How good they are to me," said she.

The actors who were with her crowded round her praising, charmed alike by her modesty and talent.

"It is your due," said they.

They were proud of her. When any one has played for a stake, and when the stake depends on your strength, and you have won, then people are proud of you.

Lord Chester came round to see her. Mr. Tudor, of all people in the world, was with him.

"What do they say?" asked she.

"Say!" exclaimed Mr Tudor; "I do not know what they say. But I know my dream has come true. I always knew of your genius in the old days at Sonnenthal. I always wanted to see you on the stage. If I—well, if I could I would come too; just to do as you have done to-night."

But Lord Chester took her hand quietly.

"We had a disagreement, dear Lady Vane, you and I. Well, you have won."

She smiled.

"You are generous, Lord Chester. But what does Dudley say?"

"Say!" answered Mr. Tudor; "why he says nothing, of course. He always does say nothing."

"Shall I send him to you?" asked Lord Chester.

"Yes."

There was only Chester standing by when he came, and this is how he told his wife afterwards.

"Lorraine, it was the prettiest sight in the world. I heard and saw it all; how could I help it? Mind, this goes no farther. But you know he came when I fetched him, and—and—well, it

reminded me somehow of a scene you and I played years ago—I mean when we had had a misunderstanding and when we made friends again."

"But Margaret was never to blame, dear."

"No, I don't mean she was; but then—well, Lorraine, give me a kiss then, and I will tell you."

So she held his hand while he told her, and so they managed to understand the story perfectly.

"You see he came when I fetched him, and there he stood—dull, cold, awkward; I believe, half afraid of her. And she was trembling all over, and her colour went and came like a young girl looking at her first love; you would never have believed it was the same woman who had kept us all hanging on her words a few minutes before. And, Lorraine, what a great, hulking brute he is to have such a pretty wife!"

"And, pray, why did not you come away?"

"Well, of course; but I could not get away. And then he was in front of the door. And then, somehow, I think she really rather wanted me to stay; she seemed so afraid of him."

"The wretch!"

"Well, so she turned to him, smiling and

looking, and colouring and getting white, as I said, just imploring a kind word without exactly asking for it. I could have knocked him down. Then by degrees she got nearer and nearer to him, slowly, and looking up to his face, half afraid, the whole time. 'What is this?' said he, huskily; 'more acting, Margaret?'"

"The brute!" said Lorraine.

"And then she started up stiff and straight and proud, as you might be, Lorraine, and she was afraid no longer. 'No, Dudley; we have done with acting for to-night.' They stood looking at each other silently, and I, well, you can understand—I was afraid to move."

"Well?"

"Then she came quite close to him and put her hand on his shoulder. 'Won't you give me one smile or one kind word, Dudley? You have not really smiled to me—not really—for so many long days.' And he hung his head, as if he were ashamed of himself. 'And you know you are all the whole world to me,' said she again. He started as if he had been shot; I shall never forget it. 'Is that true?' he said. But she went on talking, as if she had not heard. 'It is only for you I am here, it is only for you I work. I want to make you happy; I want to give you

back something of all you lost, if I can, by marrying me. I do not care what the world says —they may all make me out as bad as they like; it is only for you I care. Dudley, smile; Dudley, you are my life; let me live for you. Work is so hard when there is nothing but despair in front of you. Else I do not care, not for poverty, not for anything, if only you will be well and happy.' And then the boy sobbed. Will you believe it, Lorraine? And he put his hand on his wife's head and kissed her; and then he said, 'Heaven forgive me, Margaret, for doubting you.' They smiled then, both of them. Certainly the sun shone out from behind the clouds."

"And you, what did you do?"

"I! I said aloud, 'Well done, true heart.' I meant Lady Vane, but it sounded as if I meant Vane. I suppose both took it. As for him, I think he's a brute. You said once you thought all men were brutes."

"I don't think so now, Charley," said Lady Lorraine, very gravely.

"Well, that is a good thing."

"And Margaret?"

"Oh, there is no more to be said. She seems started on her road. We must help her as much as possible. As for the rest, when I said some-

thing about the fine result of her work, she said, 'Oh yes; what is three or four months, or even six months, out of a man's life if he has gained a step in them?'"

"She is a very clever woman, Charley."

CHAPTER XII.

Who steals my purse steals trash ;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.—*Othello*, Act iii. Sc. 3.

O, this boy
Lends metal to us all!—*Henry IV.*, Act v. Sc. 4.

Men had looked coldly on Valentin when he returned to the war. Strange rumours had been afloat, listened to even in such busy times, and his regiment had felt their honour was at stake. A man who refuses to fight when he is challenged should be allowed no place near them ; their interest cannot be his, their hopes must be strange to him. But it was war time. And then too it was unaccountable. He had seemed, nay, was so brave ; he loved honour ; he had fought before that wound of his, and before that visit to England, as if life were nothing to him, so only that he did his duty. He had shamed them all with his rash courage ; greybeards had smiled

half sadly at his enthusiasm, and the young soldiers had looked on amazed, endeavouring to emulate him in vain. He had been the favourite, the darling of the corps, with his bright smile and ready wit.

Now these tales that had come across the sea from England were unaccountable. Men felt their pride and their perception alike damaged in the relation of them. Then they thought they would wait till he came, and he would set it straight.

So in the autumn, when his wound was healed, and Valentin returned, a mysterious reception met him. There were distant looks and the cold shoulder everywhere, averted faces, and strange questions.

His pride came to his rescue, and he stumbled on blindly doing his duty, and asking for no friendship, since it seemed likely to be denied.

Then at last, when the silence and the mystery were becoming oppressive, an old friend spoke to him one day.

"Your wound was bad in England?"

"Very."

"You could not fight?"

Valentin stared.

"No; I could not."

"Or you would not?"

"No; I would not."

"Then you should not have come back, perhaps."

So then it all flashed upon Valentin, and he knew the thought that was uppermost in their minds. But he would not break the silence. They might send him away if they liked, but not a whisper of the truth should they ever hear.

Steadily he worked, and fought when occasion offered, wondering sometimes when the clouds would lift, or whether death would relieve him from requiring them to lift at all.

He was awake now at last, though so late, to life and to its responsibilities. Dreaming was done with. It had been a rough waking; but the vision that had seemed so fair now held nothing but bitterness in retrospect. He had begun life by believing he must be happy; this had turned out false, and in trying to mend the shattered creed he had marred it hopelessly. Now perhaps he went too far in the reverse direction, and thought all happiness impossible. He had made a succession of mistakes, and brooded over the past with a sombre satisfaction. There seemed nothing worth an aim in front now, and he

plodded on, as it were, in the dark, walking up just to his hand and no more.

It was curious in that dreary autumn time how the lives of Margaret and Von Broderode —the two enthusiasts—were running parallel. They were learning the lesson of life. Tears, and trouble, and solitary work, and aspiration and effort for the one, conflict too against evil report and unkind tongues; and scenes of bloodshed and misery, and death and trouble, amid suspicions, mistrust, and ill report for the other. And neither could stretch out a hand to the other; or did either know of the trouble of the other, or of the good fight that other was making. Just in the stand they made, just in the fight they fought against the fate they had brought upon themselves, were the elements of hope contained; but they knew it not as yet. The light had not broken on either.

And Valentin fought bravely, stolidly, as a Prussian can. Men said he bore a charmed life. They said that English tale could not be true. It faded as he fought. They opened their hearts to him again. They even forgave him his reticence. The old generals smiled again, and the Crown Prince shook his hand. The clouds began to break.

Later, he was wounded again, but he said it was nothing. They gave him the Iron Cross. With the supreme indifference of bitterness, he said that was nothing too.

"A man does his duty, my friend, nothing more," said he, proudly, when they wondered at him.

In fact duty was the be-all and end-all of existence to him then; in time it would be clad with brightest robes of beauty, and he would worship her with an adoration tenderer far than the sullen submission he yielded her now.

But what was praise, what were decorations to him? It might sound in his ear, or they might glitter on his breast, but after all it was all glamour; they came too late; they might please boys or mere children, but he felt as if he were an old man now, and far beyond any such gratification. The sights he had seen, the troubles he had gone through had taken the buoyancy out of his heart, and in his bitterness he thought that only extreme youth could have pleasure in such trifles.

And meanwhile this terrible war went on. Crash after crash fell on tottering France; each name of town or fort was but the sign and mark of fresh desolation. Soissons, Verdun, Schelestadt and Neu Breisach, Toul, Strasburg, Metz: what

a list it was! And now, reinforced continually, had the Crown Prince sat down with his army before Paris. What a curious life it was. Long days of waiting, excited watching, sudden repulses of sorties, furious fighting, shells bursting continually around, and men struck dead as they sat by the fireside, or played their game of cards.

Christmas came, and they were still there, making the best of the shell-fire, and of the biting cold: dying, suffering, but more hopeful than ever, and stolidly bearing their sorrows as Germans do.

Germany gathered still, backing up these obstinate besiegers; Germany saluted the King as Emperor, and Germany hid her tears and smiled, Spartan-like, at the pain she endured.

Sleighing, skating, Christmas-trees amused the soldiers at Versailles. On the 21st more serious work kept them warm, and when the fighting was over, alas, many a gap was found in the merry companies, many a voice hushed for evermore that had been loud in jest and laughter.

But Trochu was beaten—the sortie was a failure, and Germany roused herself to greater activity than ever against the besieged. The Landwehr poured into France again. Mont Avron—that hitherto irrepressible enemy—was

silenced; on the 27th the bombardment of the forts on the north-east of the town began; on the 5th the besiegers directed themselves against Issy and Montrouge.

And then at last the supreme moment comes. The last sortie is made. Mont Valerien belches forth smoke and fire and men, and the fiercest dogs of war are let loose once more.

Amidst it all Valentin stands firm, watching the thin blue line of smoke, watching the crackling fire, till his turn comes, and then he advances, happy once more, happier than he has been for months. Now the line breaks, now it is driven back, now the man close beside him falls dead, now a chassepot bullet grazes his tunic.

How steady they are! How glorious it is! Take each individual heart and effort in that stately mass, and is not the result of love and duty glorious?

But now, for a moment, they are driven back, and Valentin's spirit chafes within him. Again he urges his men on. What is this French corps coming suddenly into view? must it not be swept off from the earth? They answer to his summons; again they triumph, and the Prussian guns open fire with deadly aim.

The French are driven back; flash follows flash; the French give ground; yards back have they gone. The front line (Valentin's) keeps its assailants back. Messengers fly from the Crown Prince's staff, and still the answer comes that the advanced line is steady still.

Victors again! Montretout taken! It seems that the death-agonies of the captive city are in vain indeed. Trochu's bravery and French despair all useless; the death-writhings are of no avail.

The night came, and Valentin was back once more. The fighting done, the excitement over, his spirit flagged again. To-day he had almost hoped for death; why was he singled out to live when so many better men fell around him? But when they came to him, and when he saw the unmistakable looks of admiration in his comrade's eyes, when hand-graspings and kindly greetings welcomed him, he began once more to think there was something to live for. He began to build an ideal structure of life where duty held the foremost place.

One evening, as he sat talking over the fire with a comrade, one of the correspondents of the English newspapers came in; he had a paper in his hand.

"Let me see," said Valentin. "Let us see what they say of us in London."

Suddenly, as he ran his eye down the columns, his attention was caught by the name of Vane. It was an account of Margaret's opening night at the theatre, probably put in by one of her friends. Short and simple language, praising her talent and explaining briefly the reason of her public appearance. Perhaps its brevity made it the more pathetic.

It was a revelation to Valentin: a film rose over his eyes. In an instant he saw it all: her poverty (his doing—though perhaps that was no fault of his), her self-abnegation, her effort. He pictured her hard life to himself, and he thought that her life too had been lately through the deep waters.

They noticed his abstraction; they twitted him upon it. But he put them off, and throwing down the paper, feeling as if he must suffocate, he went out in the cold night air to walk off his agitation.

"Curious fellow, that Von Broderode. The war has driven him mad. What is there in the paper?"

But they could find nothing—nothing, at least, to excite anybody. England was talking as much

as usual, and was going to send out additional money and clothes.

But the idea of Margaret working for her bread drove Valentin distracted. He walked about for days like a man in a dream, haunted by an imperious idea that overruled his life and thoughts.

Then the armistice was arranged. Valentin wondered if he could not be free. He applied for leave. When it was granted he thought he should go mad for joy.

When he reached London he began to think he must have been dreaming, and that Margaret had never really acted at any theatre at all. How he wished that he had kept that newspaper. But no; as he ate his dinner at his hotel he found it was quite true. He took it into his head that he would have a front stall, confront her there, and see her as closely as might be. As for the rest, there was an impassable gulf between them; he did not suppose he should ever speak to her again, but he should like to see her.

There was no stall to be had. The house was full.

"It always *is* full, sir, for Lady Vane," said the man. "You must try some days before."

"Hallo, Von Broderode!" said a voice behind him, "is that you?"

"Yes," said Valentin, and turned to see who it was.

It was Mr. Mortimer, of all people in the world. Sonnenthal and the picnics flashed through the minds of both as they looked into each other's faces. Then Mr. Mortimer thought of the war, and Valentin thought of the Vanes.

"Times are changed," said Mr. Mortimer.

"Yes, they are," said Valentin.

"Coming in?" asked Mr. Mortimer, moving on.

"Can't," said Valentin. "Can't get a stall."

"Can't you? I'm very glad. Come with me. I've got a little box."

A little box it was; but there Valentin sat, hungering, constrained, wondering, and too much amazed to know whether he was pleased or not. Sitting there, he saw Dudley below, also waiting for Margaret.

"Does he always come?" asked he laconically of Mortimer.

"Yes, poor fellow, he does. But I don't think he'll come long."

"Why?"

"I don't think he's long for this world."

Valentin's interest deepened.

"The doctors say he should go south, and the Vanes say they have no means for that."

Was ever a tragedy played out like this? The dying husband watching the wife playing comedy for him to live.

"Do you see that man opposite, in the box opposite?"

"Yes," answered Valentin, hardly taking his eyes off Dudley.

"That is Bunbury. He won't live at Froghambury; he says he may go down for a Sunday in the summer. He won't do anything but come here and see Lady Vane play."

"And she?"

"Oh, she won't speak to him."

"Why not?"

"When he heard that he was to have Froghambury, he said he did not want it, that he liked his own name of Bunbury better than Vane, and that he would rather pay to be called Bunbury; then he would not see Margaret or Dudley, or any of the Vanes, because he said he had never liked them or the race, and that he had never seen them, and that he would not see them now just because he was to have their money. Well, he came one night to the play and fell in love with Margaret without knowing who she was. Then he heard of Margaret having gone on the stage, and he wrote her a very strong letter, and

when that had no effect he put some disagreeable paragraphs in the paper, which offended her ladyship mightily. Well, he comes again to the play to see his prima donna, and this time armed with a bouquet. Lo! and behold, the play-bill informs him of the truth; he sits there riveted; at first vows she shan't have the bouquet, and finally is vanquished, and throws it to her."

"And Lady Vane?"

"Oh, she left it there. The servants had to carry it away. Afterwards he wrote to apologize, but all to no effect. He always comes with his bouquet, and she always leaves it there. Dudley and the people who understand applaud; the rest think it very odd."

The curtain drew up, and there was Margaret.

What did it matter—the play, the people, the words she said? It was Margaret walking about there before them all, speaking to him, working out her life's mistakes.

Valentin buried his face in his hands and listened to the tones of her voice.

"I must see that Bunbury to-morrow," said Mortimer.

She was laughing, absolutely laughing. How could she laugh? And the house was laughing with her; all except Bunbury.

"I don't know him, and I dare say he will think me a fool. But I think he's a gentleman."

And now she is coquetting with her play-lover there. How has she the heart, when—well! Dudley is smiling now.

"Will you come with me and see Bunbury? I don't quite like going alone. And you could speak for her. Good heavens! the fellow's asleep! these Prussians are so heavy."

Do you see, as she makes her speech, her eye is fascinated? She sees Valentin in the box. The speech goes on, the house laughs, so mechanical is the business, but she and Valentin are questioning each other.

And then she smiles—a smile half proud, half sad; a smile of regret for the past long dead, left far behind. And then she laughs; and she looks at him as she laughs. It is a laugh at past folly, past weakness; it is a laugh of joy at present strength. It is present triumph.

And so the question and answer are given, and silence reigns between them once more.

The play went on, and applause rang out, Mr. Bunbury's bouquet fell unheeded, Margaret appeared before the curtain, and then Valentin awoke.

"You have had a good nap, my friend," said

Mr. Mortimer, sharply. "Will you come with me to Bunbury to-morrow?"

"Yes; certainly."

"I will explain to-morrow. You are too sleepy now."

CHAPTER XIII.

We
Are enforced from our most quiet there
By the rough torrent of occasion.—*Henry IV.*

He hath a stern look, but a gentle heart.—*King John.*

It was a true story that Mr. Mortimer had told Valentin of Mr. Bunbury. He had admired the unknown actress, he had been disgusted by his relative's profession, and when he found that the actress and the relative were one and the same person he had fallen down and worshipped. The contempt with which Margaret treated his riches and himself only added fuel to the flame. He was the embodiment of wealth, power, and sincere devotion; he was in fact omnipotence; and yet Margaret despised him.

Mr. Mortimer had mentioned the bouquets, throwing a light vein of ridicule over the man's feelings; as to the rest, he had not known it. He had not known how the quiet days of a

blissful bachelor existence in the Albany had ceased for Mr. Bunbury; he had not known of the feverish state of feeling from which Fortune's victim suffered.

Indolent ease, prosperity, independence, success had been Mr. Bunbury's all his life; born to fortune, he had asked for no favours from the world, nor had he ever gone much out of his way to show it any. He had taken his life as it came, and he had rather enjoyed it than otherwise. Troubles he had had, but he was apt to speak of them as "mistakes" he had made.

"One must be deceived in people very often," he had been used to say, "and one must buy one's experience."

Perhaps he had been rather too fond of his comfortable independence, perhaps former deceptions had made him too indifferent to form any close ties, and perhaps now the prosperity of his position hardly made up for the solitude of it.

Some of us would rather bear a little pain than never know joy; some would rather put up with small deceptions than never be trusted; and many of us, thank Heaven, would rather spend much of ourselves with some little hope of return than only lay up for a selfish future.

Perhaps something of this Mr. Bunbury felt.

For now it was getting late, and friends and interests do not accumulate about our middle age as they do about our youth.

Folly, however, does; and another feeling, Mr. Bunbury was astonished to find, does not diminish.

It had been annoyance, perplexity, trouble.

"Am I Vane? am I Bunbury?" he would say when he got up in the morning. "Bunbury; no, I mean Vane. And there is that place Froghambury. I will have no bother with it. I won't go near it. I won't look after it. Why did the old fellow leave it to me? I never liked him or it. I'll sell it for building. And just because I have it all, that girl posts my name—her name—all over London, and sets herself on a platform, where all the world goes and sees her, and pities her, because I am an ogre who has swallowed up her livelihood. Then—well, why won't she speak to me? I couldn't help offending her. I did not know her when I wrote to the papers. How unforgiving women are."

It was quite true; Margaret would not speak to him; he might shower bouquets upon her, they were left unheeded; he might send her notes, they were returned unanswered; he might come and call, she was always "Not at home;" he might send presents, they were always scorned;

he might try to see her behind the scenes, he was always refused.

Once, as she was coming out of the theatre on Dudley's arm, her cloak brushed his sleeve; he went home saying to himself he had never loved before. Another time there had been some mistake about the carriage, and Margaret was left for an instant standing by herself; he was close by, his foot was on her dress in fact, and he began to speak to her. But her frown and look of unmistakable anger silenced him, and the words died away upon his lips.

Then he tried to help them substantially.

He scraped an acquaintance with Dudley, he made extravagant overtures, and offered Froghambury as a loan, pushing all idea of a rent away with horror. He asked Dudley to present him to his wife, and stood outside the door of their house in the street while he waited, but Dudley returned with a blank face and said his wife was engaged.

"And about Froghambury?"

"Oh no; she advised me to say 'no' emphatically. She says that sort of loan always turns out a fetter, and perhaps she's——"

"Good-day, Mr. Vane, good-day;" and Mr. Bunbury began to walk away in high dudgeon. Then, remembering the trouble he had taken to

make friends with Dudley, he turned again. "If you should change your minds, or think better of it, remember to tell me. Here is my address;" and he felt a sort of quiet satisfaction in dropping another of his obnoxious cards at Margaret's hall-door.

"She is no Becky Sharp, at all events," said he to himself as he walked away.

He wrote to the papers again; this time in an altered strain. There was no praise good enough for Lady Vane, no terms high enough; he even went into the family vicissitudes lightly, and extolled her conduct to the skies.

But Margaret did not see it, or if she did she did not notice it. Praise glides by impotently; it is blame that remains and injures the life.

Once he was absolutely introduced to her. Margaret was unconscious of his identity till it was done. He trod or rather stood upon air meanwhile. It was at a party, and a circle had gathered round her. It was broken for this unwelcome visitant.

He, bowing low, opened his mouth, which was overflowing with flatteries and compliments. Again Margaret gave him that marvellous look of well-bred indignation, and he drew back,

confused. The laugh the little incident excited rang in his ear for many a day afterwards.

At last once she smiled upon him. It was half forgetfulness, for she had become so accustomed to his presence that she was indifferent to it.

She was standing near the door in the passage, and Lord Chester was talking to her. The applause that night had been louder than ever, her success more assured.

"You look very happy to-night, Lady Vane," said Lord Chester.

Mr. Bunbury was standing close by.

She smiled back at Lord Chester, and Mr. Bunbury came in for the end of the smile.

"This is better than Froghambury, isn't it?"

Then they went away laughing together, she leaning on his arm, to be put into her carriage.

It was a revelation to Mr. Bunbury.

Then she cared not for Froghambury either, no more than he did; it bored her as it did him. But what a sympathy there was between them; what would life have been, shared—— he suddenly broke off in his thought. But then she neither cared for him, nor for anything he could give her. She despised his offers, his money, his presents; she preferred her independence. Again,

how like himself, who never would be tied to any one or under any obligation to any one. What a very strange sympathy there was. He should like to talk to her about that. But in another point they were very unlike; she liked work, he didn't; she liked money, if she made it; he did not know how to make it, individually.

Was it true that successful individual effort could make a woman happy? It seemed so. How very strange. If so, he felt he loved her all the more, and he was more miserable than ever he had been in his life before.

Why was she so beautiful, and so clever, and so cruel? Why with all her poverty was she so powerful? If he might be some sort of grandfather to her, and give her all she wanted, as one gives a child toys, to be broken or thrown away the next moment, then he would be happier.

CHAPTER XIV.

Love for thy love, and hand for hand I give.
First Part of King Henry VI., Act iii. Sc. 1.

How is it possible to know when one is not an actor how much a person on a stage at night can see of the interior of the house? This question troubled Valentin von Broderode very much, so much so that for two nights he did not again re-appear at the theatre, and when he did it was neither in a box or as a happy possessor of a stall, but farther back and higher up. He would not trouble Margaret with his presence; he tacitly agreed with her to bury the past, to triumph over it, and, if it might be, to mount on it to a brighter, a better future. He would not seem to be following her, to be dodging her footsteps. He would make a future of his own.

Up there where he sat there was no fear;

Margaret could not see him; he could observe her through his glasses as much as he wished.

But one evening, from his lofty place he noted Dudley's absence; his stall was empty. There was no sign of him anywhere. This pained and surprised him.

Mr. Bunbury's box was also empty. This neither pained or surprised him, for the very first morning after his arrival Valentin had accompanied Mr. Mortimer to "The Albany" to see Mr. Bunbury, and they had there learnt that that gentleman was out of town.

As they went Mr. Mortimer had shown Valentin a crumpled scrap of paper, and had told him a strange story.

On the paper was traced faintly, "I do not wish Dudley to be disinhe—"; and lower down, "Gilbert Vane. Let him succeed to all."

"These are the last words he wrote before he died," said Mr. Mortimer. "I will swear to it. I was there alone with him."

"And you have had this all this time?" exclaimed Valentin, hotly. "Why did you not speak before?"

"I have only just come back from America. When I last heard they were living happily in

possession of Froghambury. There was no need to speak. In fact I rather doubted the existence of any other will. I half thought it was the hallucination of a sick man."

"Will Bunbury give up, do you think?"

"There is nothing to make him. This will is not legal, has no signatures. The one you found was signed by myself and Douglas, though in all ignorance."

"What harm a sick man's fancy can work."

"Or a young man's folly. Bunbury is a gentleman, I think."

"And a man of feeling."

"But Lady Vane has considered his feelings so little, he may not feel inclined to consider hers."

And then they found that Mr. Bunbury was out of town. And then when Valentin went to the play, and missed Dudley in his accustomed place, and when Mr. Mortimer went to inquire, he found Margaret with pale face and tearful eyes, but as proud as ever.

"He will die, Lady Vane," said Mr. Mortimer, drily, "if you keep him here."

"Die!" exclaimed she, as if she had been shot. "He could not die, he is so young, and he and I are only just beginning to enjoy life."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"I would give up everything—acting, success, all—if I thought——"

"Would you?" asked he, staring at her. "Give up the result of all your work, all the praise and popularity you have won, just for him, if——"

"If it would give him one moment's ease. But we should be so poor——"

Mr. Mortimer blew his nose loudly, cleaned his eye-glass, and turned away.

"I shall come and see you again," said he.

"Perhaps I have been too proud," said she, half calling after him. "But you know they were all so unkind at first."

At last Mr. Bunbury came back to town. It was the last day of Valentin's leave, and he entered Mr. Bunbury's sacred rooms with Mr. Mortimer full of curiosity.

"I am pleased to have the honour of your acquaintances, sirs," said Mr. Bunbury, rising from his arm-chair and laying aside his newspaper, bowing as he spoke with an old-world politeness.

"You have been out of town, sir, for a week," said Mr. Mortimer, hastily, as if Mr.

Bunbury had been guilty of some crime by such absence.

"And may I not, sir, go out of town for a week?" setting chairs for his visitors as he spoke. "I used to be an independent man, sir, coming and going just as I liked, but since I have had a dreadful place called Froghambury, willed to me by an eccentric relation, my time is not my own. I do not seem, sir, to be my own master, and I seem to be everybody's slave. I should not wonder, sir, if you have not something to say about Froghambury. I hear you have been to my door every day for the last week, and that is the sort of thing those Froghambury people do."

"I have something to say about Froghambury, Mr. Bunbury."

Valentin saw Mr. Mortimer twisting the little piece of paper nervously between his fingers as he spoke.

"Knew it, sir; was sure of it, by your very serious look. Everything about Froghambury is serious. It is a place in the back-woods. Enough to give an intelligent person the blues in half a day. I am a London sparrow, sir, and prefer being black. But to be serious—what have you to say?"

"You do not seem to care much about Froghambury?"

"Hate it, sir; and I hate being called Vane. Some impertinent people do it nevertheless."

"What do you purpose doing about Froghambury?"

"Let it, I think. I suppose I can't sell it. I must see."

"Suppose, Mr. Bunbury, I were to tell you that Froghambury is not really yours?"

It was comical to see the alteration in his face. A London sparrow suddenly cheated of a precious morsel might look like that. Mr. Bunbury's smile died away.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Sir Gilbert repented of that last unjust will. I was with him when he died. He could not speak, but he explained——"

"How?"

"He wrote. Here it is."

Mr. Mortimer placed the little piece of paper on the table, resting his finger firmly on it.

"What do you think of this, sir?" asked Mr. Bunbury, turning to Valentin.

"I knew them all, sir. Of course I see that justice and their happiness rests with you."

"It is a question of honour, sir. I don't suppose we can make you legally give up anything, or even allow anything to the young Vanes. They are very poor."

"But deucedly proud."

"He is dying by inches, they say."

"Eh! sir? What is that you say?"

He had heard, so they did not speak again.

"Lady Vane has not been very civil to me."

"No one has been very civil to Lady Vane."

"I have; I would have done anything."

Then, as he walked up and down excitedly, Mr. Mortimer told him the whole story. Dudley's boyhood, Sir Gilbert's ambition, the foolish love-story, the failure of the love-dream, the hard life; lately, the fierce battle Margaret had fought; and then, going back to Sir Gilbert's boyhood, when they had been youths together, he told him of the still death-bed scene, and of the understanding between them. Now, he said, with a quiver in his voice, he was doing his best for this old friend's memory.

Then Valentin told of his early friendship with Dudley, touched lightly on Margaret's nobleness, and told the story of the old cabinet, described

too how friends had looked coldly on, and she had been left to fight her battle alone.

The three men were startled by the entrance of the servant.

"But she is so deuced proud," said Mr. Mortimer, taking the card the man offered. "Why, good heavens! this is Lady Vane. Where is she?"

"She wants to know if she may come in, sir."

"By all means; by all means."

Valentin felt the hot blood rush to his temples. He could not meet her, could not see her. But on the stairs he should meet her face to face; here, perhaps in that dark corner of the room, in the excitement of the moment, he might escape recognition.

Mr. Bunbury had thought Lady Vane proud, had he?

Was this woman dressed in black, with pale face, heightened just now perhaps with the wave of colour passing over it, was this woman with the bright excited eyes so proud?

"Lady Vane, I am very delighted to meet you at last."

Her eyes seemed to laugh as they met his.

"Ah, Mr. Mortimer, this is pleasant."

She shook hands with him, and then Mr. Mortimer took the precaution to put the little crumpled scrap of paper in his pocket out of the way. She saw dimly the figure of a man bowing to her in the dark corner, and she bowed gravely in return.

Then she turned to the business in hand.

"Shall bygones be bygones, Mr. Vane?" said she, pleasantly. "Shall old scores be forgot?"

He bowed nervously. He did not like being called Mr. Vane, and he did not want his bouquets to be spoken of before these two strangers.

"Mr. Vane, people tell me I have been very proud; that I have gone on my own wicked, wilful way, and that I have asked for no help. Moreover, they say if one does not ask one cannot expect to get it. Now that you are the—head of the family, I have come to you to put my case before you. Will you listen to me for a moment?"

Mr. Bunbury bowed again, made a sign of silence to Mr. Mortimer, and again put forward a chair for Margaret. She did not notice it, but she half turned away from them all, looking into the fire.

"After all, none of you can say I have failed?"

"No; you have succeeded."

"I have not dragged the name of Vane into the mire as you prophesied?"

"No; you have covered it with glory. And it is the brightest glory a woman can win, for the result has been won by the work of her tender, loving heart."

Margaret put out her hand impulsively.

"I have misjudged you, Mr. Vane; you are good. But—why did you misjudge me so painfully at first? why did you say it was restless craving after excitement, selfish thirst for admiration, flying in the face of my bread and butter, disgrace to the name of Vane——"

"I did not know you then."

"No, you did not know me then. Mr. Mortimer, he did not know; but you know. Tell him for me it was all I could do. Tell him I was proud; I know it now. It hurt me when they all turned against me, mother, mother-in-law, neighbours,—all except Lady Chester,—just because I was poor; and Dudley hated being poor. Then it was all through me that he was poor; he hated me more every day, he doubted me more; every day he thought more and more

was I worth this death in life; every day—there had been a misunderstanding between us. Look! I am telling you all now, Mr. Vane, as if you were my dearest friend. His suspicions grew, his disgust grew; not that there was any cause, but that he was ill and miserable and poor and idle and bitterly disappointed. And could I—his wife—stand by idle and do nothing?. It was like the tomb closing over one; it was standing in a dock, innocent, and hearing the sentence of death given out, and making no protest, uttering no word. Could I bear it? Say, Mr. Bunbury, if it had been you—you with all your comforts and your social position, or you, Mr. Mortimer, and acting was all you could do—would not you too have gone on the stage?"

"No, madame," said he, smiling, "I should not have gone on the stage."

Valentin had unconsciously come out of the gloom; he stood there visibly enough.

"Ah!" exclaimed she, starting.

"No more should I, Lady Vane," said Mr. Mortimer; "I should not have gone on the stage, for I should have felt as my good friend Vane, that I very likely should have had no success there; but, if I had been a woman, with a

woman's sensitive feelings, I most probably, failing anything else, should have taken a crossing."

"You have come back to us?" said Margaret to Valentin.

"Yes; I am here as your friend, to help you if I can."

"Well, think of it, Mr. Vane," said she, turning back again; "there we were, my husband and I. He proud and angry and suspicious and poor and idle; for what could he do, with his miserable health? and I, proud too, if you like—but just too proud to be idle. Everything urged me on; not ambition perhaps, but the stage was the open door out of these troubles. I knew myself and my promptings well enough to know I should succeed; then they all told me so, certain friends I had. I knew it would cost me something——"

"Apprenticeship, work, drilling, I know," said Mr. Bunbury.

"And the associations," said Mr. Mortimer.

"And the risks," said Valentin.

"And the unkind speeches and letters, and the 'former kindnesses all forgot,' and the cold shoulder turned to me so often——"

"To a lady in your position——" said Mr. Bunbury.

"But anyhow," said she, quickly, "all that was nothing, absolutely nothing; Dudley believed in me again, and we were happy."

They were all silent.

"He always took me every night; he always sat through it all; he was always at hand; then, you know, he caught a chill one evening, and since then——"

"Well?"

"I was earning, I am earning; in time we should be better off; in time—but I mean, oh! Mr. Vane, the doctors say there is not time, and that it is a race between Death and me."

Then she fairly broke down and sobbed, burying her face in her hands as she leaned on the table. It was dreadful.

Valentin started forward, questioning the two downcast faces of the older men. How silent they were. How helpless they all three seemed.

"What do you want, Lady Vane?" said Mr. Bunbury at last. "What can I do for you?"

"What do I want?" exclaimed she, starting up. "It is money that I want; money to bring him back ease and hope and health; money to give him back the life that I have spoilt."

They stood questioning her excited young face, not knowing what words to choose.

"You shall have it all back," she added, quickly, misapprehending their silence. "I do not love money, you know. It is only for him. Is it not so, Valentin? you know."

"Yes, I know."

"You are young; you believe as I do. You are not worldly; you——"

"You are misjudging me again, Lady Vane," said Mr. Bunbury, drily.

"I only mean that you *shall* have it all back again; it is only a loan. Only let me get him well, let me take him south, let me have him again strong and hopeful once more,—he is more hopeful now even than he used to be,—and then I will work and work, oh, so hard, and pay you back."

Mr. Bunbury made a movement, as in strenuous dissent.

"No; really I am not talking idly. I know what I am saying. I have succeeded. In time, if only I have time, I shall be rich. But I have not time now; only God can give us that. Give me the money now, to cheat in the race—to cheat Death."

"My poor child, my good little girl, none of us can do that; but, you know— Tell her, Mr. Mortimer."

Mr. Mortimer hesitated and looked from one to the other. Then he fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a crumpled piece of paper.

"Yes, that is it," said Mr. Bunbury, gladly. "You must know I am not Vane at all; I am Bunbury."

"I heard you did not like the name of Vane."

"Not at all. And I never was intended to be Vane. I am Bunbury. And Froghambury is yours, and always has been. I do not think I have altered much, or done anything of which you will disapprove. After all, Lady Vane, I hope we may end by being good friends. It has all been a mistake. I do hope you will forgive me your long winter season in London."

As for Margaret, she stood like a woman in a dream, turning the little piece of paper over in her fingers. After all, this was a fairy tale; it could not be sober reality.

"Do not take me in," said she piteously at last. "I have been so miserable."

"Only read it," said they.

"'I do not wish Dudley to be disinhe—— Gilbert Vane. Let the former will stand.'"

"Froghambury is yours," said Mr. Bunbury.

"You are rich," said Valentin.

"Does this little piece of paper do that?"

"No," said Mr. Mortimer; "but a noble-hearted gentleman does it."

"Good heavens!" said Margaret, "how small-natured we little women are; and how generous a man can be. This, after my conduct to you."

"You had provocation."

"No, I hadn't. My head was turned by my success. If I could make any reparation, any——"

She turned away, unable to speak.

"You have a great deal of good feeling, Lady Vane. There is something you might do."

"What?" asked she, quickly, looking up.

"I am not a Vane; the name is not much to me; but during the last half-hour my interest in you has much deepened. I have learnt to respect you as one of the noblest women I have ever met, who has made many sacrifices for the sake of others. Could you make one sacrifice more?"

"Yes," said she at once.

In fact, what was a sacrifice more or less to her then who had made so many? They could not ask her to give up Dudley. That seemed the only thing she could fear then.

"Will you give up the stage?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen on her she could not have been more astonished. The colour rushed into her face, the little piece of paper in her hands seemed threatened with instant destruction.

"Give up the stage!" repeated she.

"I know I am asking a great deal. I am asking you to give up the good opinion of all those who have helped you lately."

"Who have stood by me when others turned away."

"To bear their gibes and scorn instead."

"And of all the world besides."

"I am asking you to surrender the height you have lately reached, all the dearly-bought steps that you have won."

"All the work, and the sacrifices, and the aspirations, and the triumphs, all the way I have made all by myself, to sink back into nothing, to be nothing, to live still, but to stagnate, to suffocate in a dull sort of lower existence. Mr. Bunbury, you do not know what you ask."

"No, I do not."

"Think of all the toil and all the hope and the triumph. Think of the career, above the heads of half the world."

"I know."

"Is it the stage against Froghambury?"

He had not the heart to speak.

She held the little paper ready to be torn in two.

"Because if it is, I think Dudley would rather I lived and worked——"

"It is not the stage against Froghambury. It is Dudley's life and Froghambury against yours and the stage."

"I see what you mean," and she bowed her head.

"It is very hard," said she presently.

Then the moment after, light came to her.

"I see. How stupid I was. I do not care for my life at all; it is Dudley's."

It was very difficult for two testy old bachelors who had disbelieved in women all their lives to know what to say. They did not say much, but they looked a great deal, and in a sort of silent way they tried to testify their gratitude and homage.

"You see it must be so," said she, simply, as if excusing herself.

And then they explained it all to her, the will in the cabinet, and the sentence scribbled later in Mr. Mortimer's sight.

"And I am glad it is so," said Mr. Bunbury.

"Froghambury Dudley's again!" said Margaret; "I can hardly believe it. The very news will make him well, he loves it so."

"Well, *chacun à son goût*," said Mr. Bunbury. "For my part such a possession at my time of life puts me out horribly. Now I shall be much happier. We shall be friends, shall we not? I shall have children in my old age; I shall come near human interest."

If, when the story was told and Margaret satisfied, they did drop a hint or two about the duties of her position and why she should leave the public stage,—if there was something sprinkled in about her social duty, and her debts to her neighbours, rich as well as poor; if Mr. Mortimer did whisper something about every one working in their own sphere, and if Valentin ventured to say something about the path of duty being marked for other people as well as for soldiers,—was it to be wondered at, and was Margaret likely to complain?

"And you," said she at last, turning to Valentin, as to a friend long lost, who had returned, "you are quite safe? have been quite well?"

"Quite."

"I heard how you fought; I heard how brave you were; I read in the paper about the decorations you got,—about the Iron Cross,—and I was so glad."

Then they parted. The clouds seemed rolling away for both.

CHAPTER XV.

> And is thine own, and so she says;
> And cares for thee ten thousand ways.
> On thee she speaks, on thee she thinks,
> With thee she eats, with thee she drinks,
> With thee she talks, with thee she moans,
> With thee she sighs, with thee she groans,
> With thee she says, "Farewell, mine own!"
> When thou, God knows, full far art gone.
>
> *Henry, Earl of Surrey.*

Two people sitting face to face. They seemed to be waiting for a third presence. O dreaded presence! O summons for which we are never quite ready, come when it may!

It was in the dead of night; the house was buried in slumber save for the two occupants of the little drawing-room; no sound was there to disturb the *tête-à-tête*, save when now and again wheels rattled noisily down the street.

At length Margaret rose from her chair to tend the fire.

"Dudley, it is so late. Had you not better

go to bed now? Will you not let me call the nurse?"

"I am so much better to-night. I am tired of my bed. I want to talk."

She came and sat at his feet.

"Are you so wakeful then? what would the doctors say to me? I am sure this is wrong."

"Never fear. I shall soon be beyond doctors' laws."

"Oh yes, I hope so, but still——"

He scanned her face. She had not caught his meaning.

"I shall not want any more doctors."

She glanced up at him, for she had shifted her position to a stool at his feet.

"I thought you were so much better?"

"Yes, so much better."

She looked but half satisfied, and he rested his hand on her head.

"Your mother came to-day, Dudley, did she not?"

"Yes. She asked very kindly after you, especially when I said it was through you we had Froghambury again."

"I wonder when we shall be able to move you there, Dudley?"

"Never."

She gazed up at him, terror-stricken, and her eyes filled with tears.

"It is true, Margaret. It is too late now. I asked the doctor to-day. I shall never see Froghambury again."

Her sobs were the only response she made.

"You must have expected this, Margaret?"

"I thought you would be better now."

"No; I shall never be better. It has come to good-bye at last. I thought I might say it to-night; but I do not know now that I shall have strength. There is so much to say, and I am so weak."

"Do not say it now, Dudley," said she, putting her hand in his; "I know all you would say, and let us wait till another time, when you are stronger. Will you not go to bed now?"

"I want to say good-bye now, Margaret. Help me, can't you? And I can't move till I have said it all; it is such a weight. Can't you understand?"

"What do you want to tell me? Let me imagine it all. But, Dudley, Dudley, you must not, cannot die. I cannot let you go. Let me die instead."

He stroked her hair fondly, seeking to gather strength and words.

"It has not been long, our life together, after all, has it, child? We—I might have made more of it. Can you forgive me, Margaret?"

"Forgive you!"

"How passionately I longed for it, in those early days at Sonnenthal. How clearly it comes back to one. How clearly one does see, Margot, just when one is going away, and it is too late."

"Hush, Dudley! you are not going."

"How wicked the passionate wish made me, and then when I got it how I spoilt it. I ought never to have had it; I have never been worthy. You did the best you could, you tried to save me from myself. But can you forgive me all, Margaret? Say it once before I die."

"Whatever there be, I forgive all. But, Dudley, there is nothing."

"Ah, it is nonsense asking your forgiveness when you do not know what you have to forgive. I must tell you, Margaret."

"Never mind it now, Dudley."

Then he half raised himself in the chair, looking at her anxious, tear-stained face as he did so.

"You are so good," said he. "I should have liked to live a little longer if I might, to catch some of your nobleness, and to understand goodness clearer, and to be better. Now I do not know what God will say to me."

"He will forgive."

"It is only lately I have begun to see."

Then he stared into the fire, and she tried in vain to restrain her tears and to govern her voice.

"So now forgive me, Margaret. I will confess —and then—but promise me absolution first—or no; that isn't fair, only I mean, I cannot die and you unforgiving. Well, child, I'll trust your love through it all. It was after all because I loved you so that I sinned so deeply."

"It is forgiven, Dudley, before you speak."

"I tried to kill him, Margaret."

"I know."

"Ah, not then—not out of the study window, though I did then, and meant it too for a mad half-second. Good heavens! how glad I was when I saw him safe, and knew I had missed my aim. No, not then, but years ago at Sonnenthal."

Margaret started.

"That was when I really would have murdered him. I thought you loved him, and I loved you.

I would not be baulked. And he—oh, he drove me mad with his calm air of superiority, and the quiet way he took possession of you. Then, too, he had saved my life, and it bound me, and I hated him for it."

He whispered the words, and as he watched her face he looked like a criminal awaiting his sentence.

"What did you do, Dudley?"

"Nothing, for he turned and spoke. He was standing on the river edge. Another moment, and he would have been pushed headlong, and eternity would have begun for him."

No sound in the room save the ticking of the clock on the mantel-piece.

"And afterwards you were sorry?"

"No, I wasn't. I do not know that I was sorry till lately, when you have put all jealous suspicions and all mean thoughts to shame by your noble self-denial and hard work."

"You have never doubted my love lately?"

"Never, child, never. But what can you say to me now?"

"I think when one loves a person very much one forgives everything; one loves even their faults. You are changed since those early days,

and so am I. That past must all be forgiven. Poor Dudley."

Then she kissed him.

"How different life has turned out from what we expected," said he.

"Not so happy?" she asked.

"Happier far, only such a different sort of happiness from what one thought of — truer, better."

How pale he was; and his words came in low, short jerks.

"And now, Dudley, in these dark days lately, when I have been working and acting there on the stage, what have you thought?"

"You? Tell me first your thoughts?"

"Mine, Dudley! Why, you know them. I only thought of you. What was my jest that I made, or what to me my fictitious tears? I only looked to you to see how you took them. Or what to me was the surging, applauding house if you were silent? what to me was my own heart-ache or my own sorrow if you were smiling?"

"And is it all over?" asked he.

"Yes; I promised. It is all given up."

"I am glad."

Half-an-hour later he moved in his chair.

"Margaret, it is good-bye now. I am going."

She clung to him.

"Let me send for the rest; they will save you, they will keep you with me."

"No, no, wife."

"Yes; let me——"

But he silenced her with a sign.

"You will live at Froghambury," he said at last.

"Yes."

"You will say good-bye to them all for me."

"Yes."

And then at last—

"Margaret, you are so young; you will marry again."

"No, Dudley, never. I swear it."

His eyes seemed to question her hungrily, as if he wanted a reason.

"I can seek for and hope for no individual happiness again, all that is past and done with. In time, if God will it so, I may be fit to join you in heaven, with a soul shriven by self-denial and by faith in Him. Dudley, when all the brightness has gone out of one's own life, one does not care about it any more; one throws it away like an empty bottle. And one only thinks

about making the days of others bright when one has spoilt one's own."

"God bless you, Margot, and give you bright days yet."

By and by an expression of peace settled on his face, and he closed his eyes gently.

By degrees the hand that Margaret held in hers seemed to grow cold.

With a shriek she roused herself from the stupor of sorrow in which she had been lost.

"Husband, you cannot leave me thus."

He opened his eyes, and they seemed to smile on her.

But others had heard her scream, and they came running to help.

Too late! too late!

Doctors and nurses and restoratives and loving hands and hearts might be there—it was too late. The Angel of Death had come; the summons had gone forth; the spirit had already winged its way on its unknown flight; no love or entreaties could call it back again; no despairing cry could win a word and break the silence now.

CHAPTER XVI.

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Nor deem the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If, rising on its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain.

Ladder of St. Augustine.

Triumph after conflict, joy after suffering.

Dawn peers out jealously, as if trembling at the sight she will unfold, and Wednesday, the 1st of March, is here. Out of the very jaws and fangs of death they come; out of suffering and bitterness and furious despair; from bloody battle-fields and days and nights of weary, anxious watching they come; and the rest, defeated, grind their teeth and look on.

Valentin is there. After the agony now he is tasting victory. And is it not glorious?

What do the German hearts feel, what do

those 30,000 men feel as they defile through the Arc de Triomphe, and what does the Fatherland, with all the hearts in it beating with one throb, feel? That the glory is worth the cost, that the struggle has been worth the pent-up strength, that the reward has been worth the waiting, that the crown is worth the cross.

They come, and still they come. Rank and file they tramp along.

And a brilliant company march with the conquering army. The Duke of Coburg, the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg, Prince Albrecht, Prince Adalbert, Prince Leopold were there, and the 30,000 men.

And France looked on, and smiled bitterly. The remembrance of that bitter smile will last for many a day.

Next morning the foes, so long face to face, parted, and the homeward march of the conquerors began.

So Valentin too was victor. Valentin too marched home.

Orations, welcomes, tears of joy, warmest greetings smiled on him. He was a hero.

Life might begin again for him now.

He seemed as if he had crossed the valley of

the shadow of death, and the sun that rose for him now was strange and new.

Could he make friends with life once more?

Ah, yes; and better, more sincerely now.

They stood on a truer footing now towards each other; there would be no chance of misunderstanding.

Praise he had had, glory he had tasted; had they intoxicated him?

Nay; he was full of ambition still. He longed for work, for employment, for advancement, and for progress.

Interests grew around him which ever way he turned; Berlin seemed too small for his ambition; his profession did not satisfy him. How multifarious were his dreams and needs; how insatiable his wants and hopes; but how realistic too.

The romance of war had taught him the reality of life. Through his sufferings and the misery he had seen around him he had become perfected in his knowledge and love of human life.

Before he had been a soldier of fortune. Now he was a warrior to combat injustice and wrong.

One day, walking in Berlin, his notice was attracted by the figure of a woman in deep mourning walking some little way in front of

him. It was not the mourning, for nearly every one now wore some sign of recent loss, but the walk, the step seemed familiar to him; the figure, notwithstanding its heavy disguise, looked like Margaret Vane's.

But he quickly lost it in the throng of foot-passengers; he had watched it half absently, now he went on his way with his head full of other things, half vexed with himself for his thought, and then he added to himself, laughing—

"If it was Lady Vane she must have gone into the hospital."

The very wildness of the notion, when he knew she was in England with her husband, for he had not heard of Dudley's death, made him smile.

About a week after he had himself occasion to go to the hospital, to ask for some favour for a soldier who had fought under him. He was at once shown into the committee-room, where were several people talking.

Whose was that pale face? whose that voice?

He started as if he had been shot. He would have known the voice among a hundred.

It was Margaret; there, seated at a table, on

which were strewed many papers, she sat, seeming intent on the business of the hospital.

Valentin sat down, as if to wait his turn, but in reality to hide his confusion.

As for Margaret, as if by accident, her veil fell over her face, and she did not raise her hand to lift it again.

Valentin sat listening to the hum of voices like a man in a dream.

Margaret living in Berlin! Margaret working in an hospital! How different this from the stage, the footlights, the excitement, and the applause of which he had seen her the centre in London.

Valentin's uniform and medals soon gained him notice; very soon an official stood there awaiting his wishes, and inviting him to come to the table.

Oh no, Valentin would not go to the table; he could say there quite well what he had to say; his business was very simple. He found he could not face Margaret thus before these strangers, and, his case stated, he speedily withdrew, though with his kindly heart he did not at once leave the building, but he went into some of the wards to see some of his poor wounded comrades.

He was sitting by the bed-side of one of them, going over again some of the hard fighting they had seen together, when Margaret hastily entered. It was quite wonderful to see the change that came over the sad place at her presence; it was like a ray of light stealing in; smiles lit up the sufferers' faces, and all those that could, rose from their recumbent posture to greet her. As for Valentin, he sat riveted to the spot watching her.

How simply it was done. A few kind words, a smile here, a small present there, an anxious inquiry next, and a long talk with the nurses, which showed all how deeply their interests lay at her heart, and she was gone.

Valentin thought he had not been seen.

That night, at a party, he asked one or two friends if they knew Lady Vane.

"Know her! yes, indeed. She is a guardian angel to our wounded soldiers, she is a Florence Nightingale; she works for them night and day, she spares no trouble, no care. She is half German, but married a rich Englishman, and now spends her money on the wounded Fatherland. You should see her, and see how they all love her."

"Does she live in Berlin?"

"No; I think not. But here is Frau Steingracht; you know her?"

Valentin nearly rushed into the old lady's arms.

When greetings and congratulations were over, she said—

"Ah, Valentin! Well; now are you going to marry Lotta? I couldn't live with her, I was obliged to give it up and come back to Berlin. But you?"

"No, no," said Valentin; "I shall not ever marry. I have too much to do. It is only rich men who can marry."

"Ah!" and Frau Steingracht drew a long breath. "You are wrong. Every one should marry. But I know your dream. It was little Margot. Well, she is in Berlin—and a widow; marry her."

Valentin coloured to the roots of his hair.

"Is she in Berlin? Tell me."

"Oh yes; I met her, and then I went to see her. She is only here for a time. Working herself to death, doing good everywhere, and spending all her money on the Fatherland. I do not think she will live, Valentin; there is a sort of unearthly look about her, like an angel might

have; and yet she says she is so happy; and, moreover, she is so soft, so subdued. No fire in her eyes, as there used to be in the old days, except sometimes when she is talking to the poor wounded."

Then she told him all about Dudley's death; how Margaret's home was now once more at Froghambury; and Valentin walked home that night in the starlight feeling very sad and thoughtful.

He did not go to the hospital again; for weeks he neither heard or saw anything of Margaret. He had his work to do, and his life seemed very full of projects and interest. Yet he longed to see her; he should like to see into her life, and know for himself if she were happy. If only he felt fitter to confront her—that was the doubt.

At last, one afternoon, he was going to his barracks across some public gardens, and in one of the side-walks he saw Margaret by herself. He stopped irresolute; should he speak to her? She did not see him; she was slowly pacing along, looking now at the flowers, now at the water, by the side of which the walk ran. There was a smile on her face. She stepped on to the little bridge; then, like a child, picked up a pebble and dropped it into the water.

"That is like an idle person; as you fall, so you stay," said she, aloud; "but what am I like?"

She looked about for a simile.

"I am nothing; that is most like me. I belong entirely to other people now, for their use; and I am happiest so."

In truth she looked happy enough.

Valentin went on his way without disturbing her. She had preached self-sacrifice unconsciously. If he could have learnt it years ago his life would have been happier too before this.

But even now happiness seemed to be coquetting with him, fanning his cheek with the evening breeze, as he walked swiftly on to his work. He used, long ago, to think happiness his right; then he lost all sight of it, and thought it a phantom; now dimly it seemed as if it were in truth hovering about him, and might some day, if not sought for itself, be his.

In those busy days it almost seemed to begin to come true at once.

In the autumn he went to Sonnenthal. There, walking in the evening twilight, he tried to dream the old dream once more.

How hazily, how vaguely it all came to him.

How changed he was since then. What a foolish boy's part he had played then. How he had misunderstood life. How he had tempted fate. Lotta Senden told him so, smiling at him coquettishly as ever.

He half laughed in his heart, for he knew she meant that fate was offering him good things again, and that he was tempting her still. He half felt inclined to close with the offer.

"And you are not married yet, Lotta? I am surprised."

"You ask me such a question as that!"

"Oh, well. I mean—" and he looked down on the ground and drew a pattern with his stick, and then he looked up to the frowning old castle, that could not smile, though the sun was doing his best to make it look pleasant, and he wondered what he should say next.

"And you, Valentin; will you not be thinking of marrying now?"

The question jarred on him.

"I think of marrying! No, certainly not. I shall never marry as long as I live. I have not time."

"You haven't time! Oh, I did not know you were so busy."

"Yes, I am. Life is short enough, in all conscience. I have not half time to do all I want. Have you ever thought, Lotta, what a lot there is to do? How many people to help, how many things to put right, how many sorrows to heal, how many men to teach, how much to discover, how much to do——"

"No; I never found it out."

"I suppose not."

"And so that is really your reason. You have not time to marry!"

He took a turn on the terrace and came back to her.

"Look, Lotta, you have been very good to me. I will tell you something if you like."

His voice was strangely soft as he spoke.

She turned her head to listen.

"Have you ever had an ideal before you, who showed you all that was good and pure and noble and worth loving, and——"

"Yes, Valentin."

She had risen now, and her hand was within his arm.

"I had such an ideal. It made earth, heaven."

"It was false, then."

"No; I was false to it."

They walked together in silence.

"Perhaps I did not understand it. At all events, I played with it; so cruelly, that I lost it. Afterwards, when I found it again, I marred it. Lotta, in looking at it, so foolishly, so passionately, so humanly, I fell——"

They had reached the little bench by the river's brim, where Dudley Vane and Valentin had once stood together.

"You too had an ideal, Lotta?"

"Yes."

"Who—what was your ideal like?"

"You are my ideal."

It was a still summer evening. The trees whispered lovingly overhead; the river kissed the green bank at their feet. But there was discord in Valentin's heart.

"You mistake, Lotta. You think you see peace, but there is no peace for me yet. I am but beginning life now."

"You told me that years ago," said she, angrily.

"But that was a mistake. I began all wrong. I have to begin again."

"You jest."

"I was never farther from it. I used to think

one must win by wishing. Now I see one only wins by fighting."

"You say you fell from your ideal?" she asked, presently.

"Yes; shall I ever rise again, think you?" asked he, pathetically. "Will hard work, and suffering, and real honest, hard fighting ever shrive me clean from that offence against the purest——"

"I think so," said a woman's voice close by. "How strange it is to hear these tones and such words."

"Why, Lady Vane, is it you?"

"Will you speak to me too, Frau Senden? How strange to find you here. And yet I might have expected it."

What questions there were; what surprise and astonishment.

"I only came this evening from Berlin. I am on my way to England. I came to see the old haunts. I——"

And then this very human heroine began to cry. It was the memory of the happy days, of the dreams they had all dreamed so well.

She had to tell her story. Her heavy mourning might have told them, but nearly every one

in Germany was in mourning for the war. It told them nothing.

So she told her tale: Dudley's death, her life at Froghambury, her great solitude.

"And so you are a rich widow?" asked Frau Senden.

"Yes."

"And you will marry again?"

"I! No; I shall never marry again. I took my youth into my own hands for myself; my life now is for others."

"Why," said Frau Senden, laughing, "that is what Valentin says."

"My friend, when one has been very sad, very sorrowful, that sort of personal happiness does not seem possible at all. It does not please one. Now I only care for other people's happiness, and it is the truest. Lately I have come to Germany to see what I can do to help it to recovery, to comfort the sick and wounded, and to aid the bereaved and afflicted as much as I may. Life almost smiles again so. Moreover, dear friends, I have my duties at home. Will you both come and see me there? Promise."

They promised gladly, and presently Margaret talked calmly enough.

"Who lives at Blumenthal now?" asked she.

"No one; people come and look at it, but no one seems to care for it."

"Ah! it was a dream-house, only fitted for dreamy people as I and father were then. And 'The Three Roses'? is it still the same, and everything else?"

"Everything is just the same, only the people are changed, and we miss you, Margaret."

The old Rhine rushed by. There seemed something of tenderness in the music of the passionate waters to-day.

"I am going to say something very silly," said Margaret at last.

They both waited.

"Why do not you two cousins marry?"

There was an awful silence.

"That is not life, Lady Vane," said Valentin at last, "that is only book-life, the story one sees in a novel, when everybody couples off to make everything look smooth and finished. That is romance; that is not life. The reality is, that generally the wrong people pair off, and the rest have to dance alone for ever. As for me, I must live yet; I have not yet worked to deserve happiness. One must put one's shoulder to the wheel before one can reach the top of the hill. I shall get there some day."

"My old friend, we seem both to have learnt our lesson," said Margaret, smiling sadly.

"And you both seem very anxious to put it into practice," said Lotta, laughing.

"As for Lotta, I heard of a gallant soldier when I was in Berlin—a hero of course—who is very anxious to share his victor's wreath with her, and to give her the glory of his name. If I were Lotta, I almost think I should welcome him to Sonnenfels."

"I almost think I shall. What do you say, Margaret?"

"Certainly I should. One does not have the chance of a hero for a husband every day."

Frau Senden laughed and signed assent.

As for the other two, they sat silent in the deepening evening shades.

The moon rose over the hill.

"I must go," said Margaret.

And yet she was unwilling. The soft undertone of the waters was so soothing to the straining ear. It was like a cradle-song to a weary child.

"It seems to tell of peace and rest," said she, pointing to the now sparkling water.

"And happiness," murmured Valentin.

CHAPTER XVII.

———with a touch of nobleness, despite
Their error, upward tending all though weak,
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him.—*Paracelsus.*

Two years have passed since Valentin and Frau Senden promised to go and see Margaret at home; a promise that Frau Senden seems unlikely to fulfil. For she and Sonnenfels have found their master, and Lotta is more German than ever, and has very few holidays from home.

Sometimes Lotta thinks that the swagger of her Berlin hero is something very like tyranny.

But Valentin has no such fetters; and he has a holiday. And welcome indeed it is. His busy life, gain him what happiness and consideration it may, does not give him much rest, and there is a worn look sometimes on his handsome face.

He makes use of his holiday to go to England.

From London he writes a note to Lady Vane and begs for a summer day at Froghambury.

"Come at once," is the answer. "You will find some old friends here."

Valentin and Margaret seemed to have emerged out of the "Sturm and Drang" period into a calm haven of rest at last.

Again he got out of his carriage at the bottom of the hill, again he walked up alone.

As he went he thought of his former arrival, when Dudley was alive, and gaiety was the order of the day. Now what should he find?

He let himself in quietly at the garden-gate and threw himself on the grass to rest amid the well-remembered scenes.

"You silly boy," said a voice, "when there is no wind, how can the kite fly?"

"And yesterday you said there was too much."

Valentin looked up.

There was Margaret, in a white dress, and a garden hat hanging on her arm.

"Come, Maurice, come to me."

A strikingly handsome boy ran up to her.

"Keep me always, Auntie Margot; don't ever send me away. You and I have such fun."

"All right, my boy. But we must go to tea now, or they will think we are lost."

The couple disappeared hand in hand down the glade.

Valentin got up at last and walked towards the house. He saw a group of people gathered under the trees below the terrace.

"Run, Maurice, and fetch that gentleman," Valentin heard Margaret say.

"And who are you, Maurice?" asked Valentin, as he took the child's hand.

"I am Auntie Margot's son."

"Oh!"

"Not son, godson I mean; and—and—more than that."

"You mysterious being," said Valentin.

After all, it was a pretty picture, when a moment after, warm welcome given, they all sat down again as old friends.

I must explain, as a showman might.

First there was Margaret, who in a sort of subdued contentment seemed to strive to provoke smiles on the faces of all around; there were Lorraine and Lord Chester, and more prosperous, more radiant than ever was our old friend Mr. Tudor; close to him sat Mr. Mortimer, who

had on a new buff waistcoat, and on it the never-failing eye-glass reposed; as for the other gentleman, it was Mr. Bunbury.

"I expect you will not remember me, sir," said he to Valentin. "I call myself grandpapa."

Maurice laughed.

"And I must introduce my child," said Lady Chester.

"Yes; only he is mine," said Lady Vane, "mine by adoption, and as he is your number three, I know you will spare him to me some day; won't she, Maurice?"

"I will have two mammas always; and by and by, Mamma Margot, when I am a man, I will help you to do all you have to do."

"You will be my god Laughter always, my boy, and keep me from getting a cross old woman."

The boy put his arms round her neck.

"You are goddess Laughter to us all now, Lady Vane," said Lord Chester.

"Oh no; I am Folly," said Margaret. "What do you say, Mr. Bunbury?"

The water of the cascade, the hum of the insects, the evening breeze all made a musical undertone.

Mr. Bunbury was so long answering, they thought it was never coming.

"I never was poetical," said he at last (Mr. Mortimer took up his eye-glass to see better), "but, watching you here at home in your 'Earthly Paradise,' with your thousand little avocations and daily duties, and all your efforts for other people, you seem to me to be like Peace after a storm."

"If that is not poetry, I should like to know what is," said Lord Chester.

"Hush!" said Lorraine. "All life nobly lived is poetry, rightly understood."

"And I," said Valentin, "having dropped into this Eden, feel as in the trough the waves make: rough sea behind, white wave in front. I rest in my cradle awhile; but shall I ever climb to the top?"

THE END.

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